

## "Effective Spiritual Leadership" – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Now we return to First Thessalonians and **Effective Spiritual Leadership**.

I think some of you might look at the sermon title this morning and think “Oh, this isn’t really for me. I’m not an elder or a deacon or a teacher. I’m sure not a pastor. This sermon is probably aimed at our church board.”

Well, if you are thinking that, you would be wrong because every Christian has been gifted by God the Holy Spirit for some sort of ministry. And every ministry is vitally important to the Church because every Christian is a vital part of ...

*... the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)*

When you are faithful to your calling, you are exhibiting spiritual leadership. You are serving as an example to those who might not be quite as far down the road to sanctification, who might not be quite so spiritually mature. If nothing else, you need to be serving as an example to the unbelievers in your sphere of influence. If we are to be faithful to our calling, we need to conduct our ministry according to the commandment of Jesus Christ, with humility, with an attitude of service, and with agape love.

Paul, in writing this letter, has expressed profound thanksgiving and joy at how the church at Thessalonica is progressing. Because of threats to the church and threats to himself, he had to get out of town sooner than he would have liked. He had to be wondering if he had given them enough teaching, enough doctrine. But when Timothy and Silas had come to Corinth with good news and a positive report, he was greatly encouraged. As he wrote in the First Chapter,

*... you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)*

Now, as chapter 2 begins, it almost sounds like Paul is trying to defend his own apostleship. It almost sounds like he was addressing challenges to his authority. Well, there certainly were challenges to his authority because there was a ton of opposition in Thessalonica, but those in the church accepted his authority, so I think Paul’s purpose goes way beyond just defending himself. He is showing them, by his example, what effective spiritual leadership looks like.

So, let’s dive into this passage now, 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, beginning with verse 1.

*For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. (1 Thessalonians 2:1)*

Now the word translated “vain” in the New King James version is *kenos* (κενός) The word literally means “aimless” or “meaningless”. It could also implicitly mean empty-handed, or without affect. So, by saying that his visit was not in vain, Paul was saying that it had a specific purpose and that purpose was achieved. It wasn’t a waste of time. And that is always true when we are faithful to the calling of God.

*He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)*

Effective spiritual leadership only happens when we submit to God’s will.

I remember when Kris and I applied to Village Missions. We prayed like crazy for closed doors. Really! It wasn’t that we didn’t want to join Village Missions. We did. We were

looking forward to it, excited about it. But we wanted to be absolutely sure that it was God who called us because if we were being presumptuous, we knew our ministry would fail.

Ministry must have a purpose. If it is to be effective, it must be God's purpose. So, if you think you might be called to a particular ministry, pray for closed doors. And then step out in faith. If God closes the door, don't be bummed out; be grateful because He has something else for you to do. And when you align yourself with His will, your ministry will never be in vain.

So, effective spiritual leadership is powered by God's purpose. Secondly, effective spiritual leadership is always conducted with boldness. And you can be bold when you know it is God who called you.

*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. (1 Thessalonians 2:2)*

Paul and his companions came to Thessalonica after they had been beat up, imprisoned and kicked out of Philippi. That had to be a bit discouraging. It would certainly discourage me. If I had come to a church and a community where I had to endure such hardship, I think I'd be a little gun-shy at my next assignment, yet they preached the gospel with boldness. They did so, despite the fact that there was much opposition, that is the Greek *agon* (ἀγών), which means contention. The contention could be external ... and it certainly was ... but it could also be internal. I'm sure Paul remembered what he went through at Philippi. He knew the same sort of thing could happen at Thessalonica. But still, he was bold in God to preach the gospel of Christ faithfully.

Effective spiritual leadership is bold in its obedience to the call of God. We have all been called to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. We must never shrink from our responsibility. We must boldly stand for the truth of the gospel.

*For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. (1 Thessalonians 2:3)*

It is interesting that the word translated "exhortation" is *paraclesis* (παράκλησις). It literally means to call to one's side for the purpose of giving advice, exhortation or comfort. I found it interesting, because one of the names of the Holy Spirit in scripture is *parakletos* (παράκλητος), one who comes along side.

Paul came along-side the Thessalonians. He didn't just serve as the sage on a stage. He was willing to be a guide on the side. In doing so, he didn't wander away from the truth. He didn't have a hidden agenda. (That's what uncleanness implies.) The word means lustful, luxurious or profligate living. In other words, he wasn't in it for himself.

Furthermore, he didn't use deceit. He wasn't trying to trick or bait anybody. There's too much of that going on in the church today. You can read books about marketing so you can fill the pews. You can craft your worship service so that it appeals to unbelievers. But that's not what Paul did.

Effective spiritual leadership is always founded on the unvarnished truth of God's word. Period.

*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. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is 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 Thessalonians 2:4-6)*

Whatever your calling, whatever your ministry, you must be obedient only to God.

I like it when people like me. Don't you? Because of that, there is a great temptation to avoid uncomfortable truths. People do tend to shoot the messenger. Just read about poor Jeremiah!

I know you don't particularly like it when I step on your toes. "Hold on there, pastor; you've left off preaching and taken up meddling!"

Folks, I must not tell you just what you want to hear. I need to tell you what you need to know. It's why I'm committed to expository preaching, because if I tell you what this Book says, I'm telling you God's truth. Paul told Timothy, he's telling you and he's telling me:

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)*

There is way too much of the wrong sort of preaching going on in pulpits across this land, too much scratching of ears, too much entertaining discourse, too much telling people what they want to hear. Paul didn't flatter the Thessalonians. He told them what they needed to know, not what they wanted to hear. Despite the fact that he was appointed by God as an Apostle of the Lamb, he didn't make demands for himself. He didn't try to butter them up so they would like him, maybe give him a bigger salary. (That wouldn't have been hard, since he didn't accept one.) He wasn't concerned with making a name for himself. He didn't seek glory from any human being. He wasn't looking for a lucrative book deal. He simply preached the truth of the Gospel.

Effective spiritual leadership is obedient only to God. So, as you conduct your ministry, be sure you are doing it God's way. And if you encounter resistance or persecution, with humility, just say: "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" (Acts 5:29)

Effective spiritual leadership is purposeful, that is, conducted according to God's purpose. It is conducted with boldness. It is conducted in truth. It is obedient only to God. And finally, Effective spiritual leadership is motivated by love.

*But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. (1 Thessalonians 2:7)*

I don't know that there is any expression of human love so pure as that of a nursing mother. To get a greater love, I think we need to go all the way to God, who loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son so that we would not perish in hell. Paul likens his own heart to that of a nursing mother.

*So, affectionately longing 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 dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:8)*

Village Missions has a motto, and I know you've heard it before. It's the charge we were given as we were dispatched to the field. "Preach the word and love the people." This needs to be the charge for every ministry in the Church.

*This is My commandment, says Jesus, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)*

Effective spiritual leadership is motivated by love, the kind of love that would be willing to sacrifice your own life to serve others.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)*

A ministry motivated by love is always other-centered.

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)*

If you truly love people, you will want what's best for them. And it is in the best interest of everyone that they not spend eternity in hell. So, we need to call people to Christ. We need to live our lives in such a way that Jesus is exalted.

Every human being is a sinner and the just wage of every sinner is eternal death.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Isn't that great news?

*"THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9)*

We need to demonstrate God's love for us by loving others. We need to lead people to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

That is effective spiritual leadership, according to God's purpose, conducted with boldness, faithful to the truth, obedient only to God, motivated by love.

It worked in Thessalonica, and it can work here. Rise up, oh Church!

To God alone be the glory!