



# *Shared*

The gospel is to be boldly shared with compassion and grace.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

Persecution leads to a stronger and more faithful church. It does not make sense on the surface, and it certainly does not fit the plans of those who oppose Christ. Suffering can bring out the best in God's people. It produces a dependence on God that leads to boldness rather than fear. This is what Paul experienced during his missionary journeys, and it is what he encouraged the Thessalonians to remember as they continued their walk of faith.

**How does persecution for one's faith in Jesus lead to a stronger faith in Him?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

We tend to allow past experiences to determine future actions. If we have one bad experience at the dentist, we commit to never return. If we go to church and no one speaks to us, we become convinced that all churches are like this. If we share our faith with someone and the outcome is not what we desire, we tell ourselves to never do that again. Paul had a bad experience in Philippi but did not allow this to stop him from being obedient in boldly sharing the gospel with compassion and grace with the people at Thessalonica.

Paul referenced his bad experience in 1 Thessalonians 2:2. Acts 16:16-24 provides a detailed account of this experience. As Paul and Silas proclaimed the gospel, a demon-possessed slave-girl started causing a ruckus. Paul rebuked the demon in the name of Jesus, and the unnamed girl was set free from her oppression. One would think there would be a great celebration because of this. The opposite took place. Paul and Silas were placed before the ruling class, beaten, and sent to prison.

We saw in chapter 1 that the three missionaries did not allow bitterness to take root in their hearts. Paul, Timothy, and Silas were thankful for the Thessalonian church, and they expressed their gratitude to the Lord. They prayed for the people in the congregation and offered encouragement for the substantial influence they were having in their region and beyond. If bitterness from past negative experiences was present, the missionaries would have been focused on themselves and not on the gospel message being presented.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, marking the descriptors that reveal how Paul and his coworkers conducted themselves while in Thessalonica. How did their conduct open the door for sharing the gospel?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## PERSISTENT (1 THESS. 2:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our visit with you was not without result. <sup>2</sup> On the contrary, after we had previously suffered and were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition.

### VERSES 1-2

When we make a commitment to share the gospel with others, we need to know that opposition may occur. Jesus encountered opposition from the religious elite. Paul and his coworkers encountered opposition in *•Philippi* and Thessalonica. We will encounter opposition in our settings too. Instead of allowing opposition to discourage us, we may find that it empowers us.

A first step is to focus on what God is doing in spite of the opposition. Paul had this focus when he said that their ministry to Thessalonica ***was not without result***. This phrase shows their ministry there had purpose, meaning, and impact. Paul could have been referencing the starting of the church. He also might have been considering individuals who had been rescued from sin. Either way, impact was being had.

As we persistently look for current impact, we need to also learn from the past. Paul acknowledged their previous suffering and outrageous treatment. He used two different words to help his readers understand what had taken place. ***Suffered*** references physical abuse and ***treated outrageously*** can indicate an effort to emotionally humiliate someone with words. Paul did not seek to hide or cover up the past. He acknowledged it and did not let it stop him. We need not let our past negative experiences stop us either.

**How might a past challenge become an obstacle to a person sharing the gospel? How can a past challenge serve as a means for growth in one's ability to share the gospel?**

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Paul used the past negative experiences to embolden him all the more. Have you ever observed a child learning to ride a bicycle? He will fall only to get up again and again. He does not allow a negative past experience to determine his future success. If anything, he uses the past to learn how to better operate the bicycle in the future. When we see something like this, we cannot help but cheer for the child.

Likewise, Paul used the past to propel him forward. His boldness, however, was not rooted in self but rather in the gospel. The apostle recognized his strength was limited. His focus was neither on himself nor his accomplishment. His focus was the saving message of the gospel.

The apostle also did not hesitate to ***speak the gospel*** message. Yes, our lifestyle must match our words, but we cannot adequately share the gospel without using words. We can serve people a meal in the name of Jesus and speak His name to them. We can offer people a safe shelter on a cold winter night and tell them we do this because of the love of Christ. We can offer someone words of comfort during a difficult time and tell them we do so because Christ is our Comforter and Provider. Paul lived the gospel in front of the people of Thessalonica while also boldly proclaiming the gospel message of Christ with a grace-filled heart of compassion. To do anything less than this would not be following the model Jesus set before us.

**Why is it important for believers to do more than simply live a godly lifestyle?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *Evangelism and Missions*

The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. (See Ps. 67:2; Acts 1:8.)

## GENTLE (1 THESS. 2:3-7)

<sup>3</sup> For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. <sup>4</sup> Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, who examines our hearts. <sup>5</sup> For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives — God is our witness — <sup>6</sup> and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others. <sup>7</sup> Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nurse nurtures her own children.

### VERSES 3-7

Paul, Timothy, and Silas were in a difficult setting yet operated with gentleness. They did not compromise the message they were given by God, nor did they take credit for anything good that came as a result. Instead, they *were gentle* in their words and service to the Thessalonian church.

One example of gentleness is seen in the purity of their message. Paul was a consistent advocate for the proclamation of the pure gospel. He told the church at Galatia: "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!" (Gal. 1:9). Paul wanted this same message to be heralded throughout Thessalonica and would not compromise in any way.

The trio also had no intent to deceive their listeners. The word translated *deceive* in the original language can refer to the placing of a trap to capture someone. When someone is operating in the flesh and outside of a gentle spirit, the goal can be to ensnare others for the sake of personal gain. The missionaries did not deceive their audience.

Paul, Timothy, and Silas exercised gentleness because they had been *approved by God* to share the gospel. God had allowed them to experience persecution in their lives. Given the fact that this church was going through persecution as well, the missionaries would be able to relate to the church members. This would afford the missionaries the opportunity to share a message of hope and encouragement in the midst of great struggle.

The gentleness of the missionaries was also evident in their desire to *please* God. Seeing others come to faith in Christ is something to be excited about. Luke tells us that all of heaven rejoices in

this (Luke 15:7). The caution, however, is the desire of the flesh to want to take credit for what has taken place. If we start to think we are important, we have stopped being gentle and have become arrogant. Paul and his coworkers had no part in this as their focus was pleasing God alone.

One way they were able to please God and not man was by not using ***flattering speech***. Using such language seeks to draw attention away from God and to man. If Paul had used flattering speech, he would have elevated others ahead of God, and the goal would have been based on greedy motives. Some people in Paul's day, as well as some today, seek to use the gospel as a means of personal and financial gain. Their effort is immersed in language that seeks to elevate self and others ahead of God. This is sin and should not be a part of sharing the gospel.

All of the aforementioned examples of gentleness by the missionaries resulted in serving others ***as a nurse nurtures her own children***. The word ***gentle*** indicates the act of showing compassion, tenderness, and kindness on a regular basis. This was not a one-time event, it was a lifestyle.

**Where is the balance between being gentle and being bold?  
Can a person be both at the same time? Explain.**

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## **BLAMELESS** [1 THESS. 2:8-12]

<sup>8</sup> We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. <sup>9</sup> For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers and sisters. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. <sup>11</sup> As you know, like a father with his own children, <sup>12</sup> we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

## VERSES 8-12

Paul and his cohorts set an example. They were blameless in their commitment to the believers in Thessalonica, they were blameless in their work ethic, and they were blameless in their passion to empower others to share the gospel message.

Verse 8 articulates their heart for the believers in Thessalonica. Paul and his collaborators shared the richness of the gospel as well as their **own lives**. The word **share** means to give something of significant value to another. This is not giving something away and the giver being left with nothing. Instead, it is sharing together so that all parties involved benefit.

The sharing of the gospel and their lives resulted in a lifelong connection between the trio and the church, as they **had become dear** to one another. We should read this in the context of verse 7, where Paul talked about the connection between a mother and her child. This is the kind of heart connection that had taken place.

Paul, Timothy, and Silas were also blameless in their work ethic. This was evident in their consistent work so that they **would not burden** them. A normal byproduct of persecution was financial hardship. Some who professed faith in Christ were boycotted. This likely was taking place in Thessalonica. Paul could have asked for financial support and would have been justified in doing so. But he was more concerned with sharing the gospel and not bringing any additional financial concerns upon the congregation.

**Why was it important for Paul to remind his readers of how he and his coworkers had gone about their work while in Thessalonica?**

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The last example of blamelessness was their commitment to empower others in the midst of the struggle. Paul had compared his love for the Thessalonians to a mother nursing her infant (v. 7); now he embraced the role of **a father with his own children**. In the first century, a good father served as teacher and trainer. He provided both wisdom and discipline. The parent-child relationship has a powerful dynamic. Like maturing children, new believers need a balance between a tender embrace and a firm challenge.

As a father, Paul **encouraged** the church. This word means to come alongside someone else. No one likes to be alone, especially in the midst of a trial. The trio also **comforted** the believers. This same word is used in John 11:19,31. Jesus provided Mary and Martha the comfort they needed at the tomb of their brother Lazarus. Finally, Paul **implored** the church to live worthy of their calling. The word *implored* means to provide testimony on behalf of someone. When people are going through persecution, they might start looking for the white flag of surrender. They feel hopeless because they cannot see the end, and the present is difficult. These three faithful servants of Jesus testified again and again to these believers that were dear to them and that they were worthy because the One they served is worthy.

**What actions might a person embrace or relinquish in an effort to stand blameless in their commitment to their church family and to the gospel?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary or Bible handbook to learn more about family relationships in the first century.*

Paul used parental relationships to illustrate how he and his companions ministered in Thessalonica. Review articles about family in a Bible dictionary or Bible handbook to research how families interacted in the first century. Why would Paul use these images to describe his interaction with the church? How can believers today balance encouragement and instruction?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- Potential persecution does not excuse believers from sharing the gospel.
- Gentleness and compassion open the door for sharing the gospel.
- Demonstrating Christlike character allows believers to influence others.

**List fears or hesitancies that get in the way of you faithfully sharing the gospel with others. Ask God to give you boldness despite your fears and hesitancies. What other actions do you need to take to be bolder in sharing the gospel?**

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**Discuss with your group ways of fostering compassion within the group. Identify actions the group needs to take to demonstrate compassion more effectively for others. What standards might the group adopt to foster compassion and gentleness within the group without compromising the gospel?**

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**Paul, Timothy, and Silas encouraged, comforted, and implored the church to live worthy of God’s calling. What specific and tangible steps can you take this month to encourage, comfort, and implore someone in the church or your community?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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