

# 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12

*A Ministry in the Word*

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## Scripture Reading

*As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*

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## Two Witnesses — the Outer and the Inner

The precision of Scripture is on display in the verses leading up to verse 11. In chapter 2 verse 5, the apostle says: *nor a cloak of covetousness — God is witness*. But in verse 10, he says: *ye are witnesses, and God also*. When he speaks of what they could see with their eyes — the apostles' outward conduct among them — both the Thessalonians and God are witnesses. When he speaks of inward motivation, he calls God alone to witness. There are things that man can see, and things only God sees. There is a moral excellency when the two testimonies agree — when what men see on the outside is matched by what God sees on the inside. The hypocrite is content with the outward testimony of men alone. The apostle was concerned about both.

## As a Father — The Three-Fold Ministry

Earlier in the chapter, the apostle had drawn on the picture of a nursing mother cherishing her own children. Now he draws on the picture of a father. He is not describing what ordinary human fathers always do — he is drawing on the ideal that God has in mind for the father's role. What was given to these Thessalonians in three weeks of apostolic ministry was given with both the nurturing character

of the mother and the exhorting, comforting, testifying character of the father. These two together form one whole. They cannot be split into love on one side and something other than love on the other — both are love, but love expressed to two different kinds of need.

The three words in verse 11 — exhorted, comforted, and charged — map onto three aspects of what a father does for his children in God's ideal. Exhortation is towards steadfastness: the Thessalonians were under persecution and needed to be strengthened. Comfort is consolation in the face of the enemy pressing upon them. Charging — or testifying, as Darby renders it — is the making of solemn declarations because the things of God carry His authority and are not to be trifled with. Each of the new converts at Thessalonica received all three: *every one of you*.

## **The Ideal of the Father — and Its Failures**

The Scripture supplies both the ideal and the record of failure. In 1 Kings 1:6, the word is given concerning Adonijah: *his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?* That is the very thing that our verse 11 calls for — a father who speaks to his children, who exhorts and testifies to them. David failed in it. Eli the priest failed in it before him. It is not always an easy thing to do.

There is a wisdom in beginning when the children are young, when the problems are small and can be addressed before they become large. A sapling needs only a stake fastened beside it to grow straight; a large branch requires far harder work. The life of the father matters too: exhortations that are not backed by a corresponding life carry little weight, and children have a remarkable ability to detect any deviation between what is said and what is lived.

## **Children by New Birth — Sons by Standing**

The apostle's use of family imagery leads to a word about God's own family. We are not adopted into God's family in the human sense — as if taken in as an orphan who receives a new home but not a new nature. We are born again into God's family, made partakers of the divine nature, possessing God's moral qualities by the new birth. He is our Father because we have His nature.

The word *adoption* in Ephesians 1 and Galatians 4 is better rendered *sonship* — it speaks of a standing and a status that Old Testament saints did not possess. Being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, we are given the status of sons. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* So there are two lines of truth running together: we are children by new birth (which relates to nature), and we are sons by standing (which relates to position). Both are true of every believer. The new birth introduces us into the family; the sealing of the Spirit gives us the standing of sons.

## **Walk Worthy of God**

The object of all this fatherly ministry is given in verse 12: *that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.* In the family of God, the moral features of God should be in display. That is why Peter writes that we are made partakers of the divine nature. Those moral qualities, implanted within us in the new birth, are what are meant to come out in the walk. Without them, no one can walk worthy of God.

There is such a thing as walking worthy of idols — a deportment consistent with worshipping stones and sticks and dead images. These Thessalonians had recently turned from exactly that. It is fitting that they should now be exhorted to walk worthy of God.

The word *that ye would walk* is not the language of commandment. He does not say, thou shalt walk worthy. He was gentle among them, he did not use flattering

words, he did not seek his own glory — and the exhortation to walk worthy flows out of that whole manner of life. This is the distinctively New Testament character of things: not a list of commandments but a drawing-out of what a new life toward God should look like. Three scripture passages speak of walking worthy: worthy of the vocation (Ephesians 4:1), worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10), and here, worthy of God. Each reflects what the Spirit is pressing at that particular point.

## **His Kingdom and Glory**

The call is unto His kingdom and glory. The kingdom here is not the millennial kingdom — the presence of throne and king and tribute are not in view. It is the kingdom as a moral sphere, as the Lord spoke of it to Nicodemus: one must be born again to see and enter it. The apostle expresses the same thought in Romans 14: the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. Hebrews speaks of an unshakeable kingdom — and what is unshakeable is precisely this moral sphere into which we have been called. The sphere of profession, with its tares and its leaven, will be shaken when God shakes all things.

And the glory is the future glory of Christ above — the appearing for which the saints wait and toward which the whole walk is directed. God has called us unto both: the kingdom now, the glory then. The call sets the direction. It is not towards the world; it is not a downward walk. God calls us upward and forward, and the walk worthy of Him follows that call.

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