
1 Thessalonians 2

Verses 7-10: A Nurse -- A Father -- Laboring Night and Day -- A Growing Love
Bible Reading

Opening Reading -- 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

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But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear to us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: 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.

Gentle in the Midst: Verse 7 and the Lord's Place

Darby's rendering of verse 7 says 'gentle in the midst of you' -- where the King James has 'among you.' The word midst is telling. There is a place in the midst of the assembly of God that belongs to the Lord Jesus -- 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' The Apostle Paul was gentle in that place. He knew whose place it was. And being close to the Lord is what made him gentle in the midst, not displacing the Lord who belongs there, but serving in the spirit of the one who said 'I am among you as one that

serveth.'

Verses 7 and 11 make a pair. Verse 7 gives the nurse's side of Paul's character toward the Thessalonians -- the gentle, cherishing, nursing care of a mother with her own children. Verse 11 gives the fatherly side -- the exhorting, comforting, and charging of a father with his children. Paul draws on both sides of family life to describe what was present in his ministry to the new believers. He was at once both a mother and a father to them.

A Nurse Who Cherisheth Her Own Children

The image chosen is specific: not merely a nurse in the professional sense, but a nurse who cherishes her own children. This is designed to exclude the hired hand. A nurse may go into nursing romantically and after a while find it has become merely a job. That is not what the apostle has in mind. The nurse of this verse has her heart attached to the child. It is not without skill -- the knowledge and care that belong to nursing are there -- but the heart is engaged. Her own children: that word 'own' is perhaps the strongest single word in the verse. It excludes the mercenary and the indifferent.

There is a beautiful example of this in Exodus 2. When Pharaoh's daughter found the infant Moses in the basket among the reeds, she gave the child back to his own mother to nurse him. 'Take this child away and nurse it for me,' she said. Moses' mother was nursing her own child -- and nursing him for another. That is the double character of the image: a heart attached to the child, and a consciousness that the child belongs ultimately to another. In Christian ministry, those who are brought under the gospel belong to the Lord. They are nursed for His sake. The servant who nurses a congregation in order to build up a following for himself has missed this entirely.

Yearning Over You: A Love That Grew

Verse 8 says 'so being affectionately desirous of you' -- Darby has 'thus yearning over you.' The word is stronger than mere fondness. And there is something to observe about the trajectory of Paul's love through the epistle. In chapter 1 verse 4, he addresses them as 'brethren beloved of God.' By verse 8 of chapter 2 he says they had become 'beloved of us.' In chapter 3, verse 8, the language rises to its most intense: 'we live if ye stand fast in the Lord.' The farther he reads, the more Paul seems to love them. Christian affections are meant to grow, not to remain static. They are not a fixed quantity set at conversion and unchanged thereafter.

It is worth noting what Paul was doing while his love was growing. He was not with them. He was somewhere else, receiving no news, unable to see them, restrained from returning by circumstances. And yet his love increased. That is what true love does. He wrote to the Corinthians: 'the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.' His love was not conditioned on its return. And that is a pattern for our own affections as members of the one body -- to let them grow, not to nurse grievances that keep them from growing.

The Link Between Love and the Coming of the Lord

There is a thread running through the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians that connects Paul's love for the Thessalonians with the coming of the Lord. In chapter 3, verse 5, Paul could no longer forbear -- he had to send Timothy to know how they were doing. The intensity of unmet longing reached the point where he could not hold it back. And what is the theme of the book? The coming of the Son from heaven. The Lord Jesus was here in this world and then He left. He loves His own -- with a love greater than Paul's. And He knows everything about them, which Paul did not. Yet there is a desire to see them face to face. What lies behind the Lord's coming again? It is reverently suggested that this is one of the things -- love that cannot forbear forever, that yearns for the

face-to-face meeting that is the rapture.

Not the Gospel Only but Our Own Souls

Verse 8 contains a remarkable statement: 'we were willing to have imparted unto you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls.' The gospel was the treasure they had been entrusted with. They brought that. But love moved them beyond the delivery of the message. They would have given their very lives for these people if it had been called for. This is not a professional relationship where a certain service is rendered for a certain payment. It is a bond of soul to soul, one body, one life. 'Because ye were dear to us' -- or in Darby, 'beloved of us.'

Laboring Night and Day: The Gospel Freely Given

Verse 9 grounds the gospel's free character in Paul's own practice: 'for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.' The labor and toil are specifically noted -- this was not easy work. Night and day. And the motive was that the gospel should come to the Thessalonians without cost to them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'What is my reward then? Verily, that when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge' (1 Corinthians 9:18). That was his bottom line. The gospel was to be free.

The example was not only a matter of integrity but of direct teaching. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul would write: 'if any will not work, neither shall he eat.' Some in the Thessalonian assembly had already given themselves to idleness, being busybodies rather than workers. The sight of Paul laboring night and day for the sake of the gospel was a standing rebuke to such a course and a living example of what he required of them. His life and his words went together.

Holily, Justly, and Unblameably: Godward and Manward

Verse 10 gives three adverbs describing the apostles' conduct: holily, justly, and unblameably. The first is Godward -- conducting themselves in the fear of God, in piety. The second is manward -- righteously, doing right toward others. The third is in the sight of all -- unblameably. It is almost a compressed statement of Titus 2:12: 'teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope.' They were living exponents of those very principles -- the grace of God that brings salvation, expressed in their practical behavior among the converts.

Two witnesses are cited. The Thessalonians themselves are witnesses to what was visible: the conduct, the labor, the freedom from flattery. But God is cited as witness to what was inward: no covetousness, no seeking of glory, the sincerity of heart that only He could see and verify. The distinction between what men can observe and what only God can witness is preserved carefully throughout these verses.

The closing phrase of verse 10 deserves attention: 'among you that believe.' An apostle might have said 'over you that believe.' Paul says among. He was not set over the Thessalonians as a superior being who had arrived from a higher plane. He was among them -- a sheep of Christ, just as they were sheep of Christ. Peter said the same thing to the elders: be among the flock, not lords over the heritage (1 Peter 5:2-3). The conduct described in this verse was the conduct of a man who knew his own place before God, and that place was among his fellow believers, not above them.

The Moral Source of the Testimony at Thessalonica

A moral stream never rises above its source. The Christian testimony at Thessalonica began at the highest possible level: men who had been entrusted

with the gospel came with the full knowledge and skill of that trust, combined with the tenderness and affection of a nursing mother with her own children, conducting themselves holily, justly, and unblameably, laboring night and day so that the gospel should be free, and having no trace of deceit, impurity, guile, flattery, covetousness, or seeking of human glory. That was the starting point. What a starting point.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of this not to speak well of himself but to set before them an example. In the later chapters he will call them to the same affections toward one another and toward all. The love and care expressed here is what he wants expressed among them. The pattern was given them at the very beginning. They saw it in the men who brought them the gospel. Now they are to live it out in the body of Christ wherever they are -- while they wait, with believing hearts, for the Son from heaven.

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Lord willing.