

Paul's Preaching

1 Thessalonians 2:3—12

For the last couple of weeks we've been defining Paul's doctrine and examining the importance he placed on preserving and passing on the doctrine given him directly by Jesus Christ. We also looked into some of his methods of presenting this doctrine and discovered that he was gentle, yet bold, always faithful to the Mystery doctrine that was given to him. Although he didn't intend to offend, God-haters will always be offended by anything coming from God and so many took offence, to the point of even physically tormenting Paul. Even many of those who initially accepted this doctrine of the Mystery turned away in unbelief. This didn't cause Paul to change his tactics by making his gospel more tolerable, for even at the end of his life he was exhorting Timothy to continue in propagating the Mystery doctrine that was entrusted to him (1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14; 2:2). Paul's encouragement to Timothy exemplifies his attitude during his entire ministry, which should be embraced by every church in this Age of Grace holding fast the sound words of Paul (2 Timothy 1:13).

2 Timothy 1:7—8 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...

In the negative (verses 3—6)

When Paul came to Thessalonica he approached them not with the intention to offend but to boldly preach the Mystery Gospel. It's actually impossible to proclaim Paul's Gospel without causing offence because Jesus Christ is a stumbling stone and a rock of offence (Romans 9:33). The only way to keep from offending someone with Paul's Gospel is by cleaning it up to make it palatable to all people. This would require changing or hiding the doctrine we are to hold firm to (1 Timothy 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13—14). If we are standing firm in Paul's doctrine and boldly proclaiming it to the world as Paul says we should (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:2) people will take offense. That should not stop us from spreading the message Paul defended with his life.

He first tells us how he did not come to them. Verse 3 says he did not come to them in order to deceive or fool them with cunning rhetoric. He was coming to them in purity (not uncleanness) presenting exactly what God had given to him. Even though it was sometimes a difficult message to proclaim (men don't want to hear they are wrong and need to turn from where they are heading and turn to God) Paul spoke to them the words of God so as to please God. He was not saying these things to tickle the ears of men giving them things that they would want to hear.

Paul continues by stating he didn't come to flatter them nor try to make money off of them. He wasn't seeking his own glory. His whole mission was to put Christ first telling them the words they needed to hear to lead them away from their idols and to Jesus Christ.

In the positive (verses 7—12)

Having stated how he did not approach the Thessalonians, Paul now lists the positive steps he took in dealing with them. He, above all, was gentle even comparing himself to a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children. What a great and wonderful love Paul had for the Thessalonians. It was Paul's deep understanding of Christ's great love for him that drove him to put his life on the line for the sake of the Gospel (Ephesians 3:14—19). It was a realization of this love that gave Paul no choice but to serve God (2 Corinthians 5:14). This is why Paul worked night and day to bring the Gospel to them. You might recall that Paul was still supporting himself by making tents (Acts 18:1—3; 2 Thessalonians 3:8) so that he would not become a burden to the people he was ministering to.

While many believed, many others were offended to the point of attacking those who became Christians and driving Paul out of the city (Acts 17:5—9). Did this happen because Paul was too harsh in his presentation of the Gospel? Could he have softened the message so as not to offend? Obviously

not. If Paul were to soften the message given him by Jesus Christ he would be doing so to please men. Paul's desire was to please God even if he had to suffer. Churches that preach Paul's doctrine timidly do so only to please men by preaching what does not offend. This displeases God by going against everything Paul taught and exemplified (Galatians 1:10).

But why would the Gospel of the Grace of God be so polarizing? Shouldn't those who don't like what they hear just turn away? It's obviously more than a dislike for the messenger even though Paul always seems to be at the epicenter of controversy. Those who proclaim the Gospel of Grace are in the middle of a spiritual battle. Satan is going to try his best to subvert the message. He confuses, discourages and undermines God's work and God's people to make them as ineffective as possible. Many Christians today are living in a religious fog because there is so little clear teaching on Bible interpretation and application. Today's churches, looking to bolster attendance, cater to the lowest common denominator believer afraid to dig into the deeper things of Scripture with the assumption that their congregation only wants to feel good about their relationship with Christ. We need to be a strong beacon showing forth the light of Paul's Gospel and not get lost in a sea of me-too churches. We stand out by being strong, bold and clear not shirking away from Paul's doctrine.

Walking worthily (verse 12)

Many think of Paul only as an evangelist going throughout Gentile lands, preaching the Gospel and setting up churches. However, Paul's main goal was to see these new converts grow spiritually. Obviously, getting a person saved is important but that is but the beginning of a life-long journey. Instructions for living in this Age of Grace are found only in Paul's writings. Everything written in Paul's 13 books is applicable to those of us in the Church, the Body of Christ. As soon as we step outside these books we are reading someone else's mail and directives.

For instance, many people take what Jesus said about being the true vine in John 15 as being written to us. However, it is addressed to Israel and relates to the nation of Israel not individual believers in this age. The pruning of the unproductive branches refers to unbelieving Israel, not Christians who fail to produce fruit. We will not be cut off and burned in the fire if we don't abide in Christ. Other passages often confusing Israel with the Church include 2 Chronicles 7:14 (The promise that God will forgive sin and heal the land was given to Israel if they would humble themselves to God), Matthew 6:14 (We will not be condemned to hell if we don't forgive others), Luke 14:33 (We don't have to sell all our possessions to be a true disciple of Jesus) and Mark 11:24 (Every prayer we pray is not answered the way we pray). These are just a few examples of what happens when we take verses meant for someone else and apply them in this Age of Grace.

A failure to rightly divide Scripture has even more serious consequences. We will be unable to correctly interpret Scripture making it impossible to be filled with the knowledge of God's will for our lives. The end result is being incapable of walking with the Lord in a manner that will please Him (Colossians 1:9—10). The end result of not holding Pauline doctrine above all else will ultimately affect your whole spiritual being.

It is only in Paul's writings that we know of our secure relationship with Christ because of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; Colossians 2:10—14). Since we are in this special position in Christ we now need to act like it (Colossians 2:6; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 4:1; 5:8 with Paul using himself as our prime example in this Age of Grace of how to live for Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:6—9).

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