

Self-Giving Love

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

A pastor shakes the hand of one of his parishioners and says, “Good to see you today, brother Joe; I would like to see you often at the church, not just during Christmas and Easter.”

The man replies, “But pastor, I am here in the church...”

Pastor replies, “Brother Joe, I want you to join the army of the church.”

The man replies: “But I am in the army of the church; I am in secret service.”

We are studying Paul’s First letter to the Thessalonians. Paul is thanking God for these church members who have a **genuine Faith in Christ**. Their **faith** produced **work**; they **served** God with **love**; they **did not give up under pressure** and persecution; they had **steadfast hope** in Christ. On the other hand, Paul’s letter describes the leaders of the church as **Having a Life of Prayer, Proclaiming the Gospel, and Becoming an example**.

Today we move on to the second chapter. Here we find Paul sharing his care and self-giving love towards the Thessalonians.

1. Do not Please People, Please GOD

Author Brennan Manning* writes: “The dominant sin in my adult life has been my cowardly refusal to think, feel, act, respond, and live from my authentic self, because of fear of rejection... The opinions of others exert a subtle but controlling pressure on the words I speak and the words I stuff; the tyranny of my peers controls the decisions I make and the ones I refuse to make. I am afraid of what others may say.”¹

We all can fall in this trap. As your pastor, I can fall in this trap as well. Whom do I please? God or my congregation? God or certain persons in my congregation?

Paul was a bold speaker. But I am sure he was also afraid of the circumstances around him. He did trust God for his guidance and his words. It was not easy in his

life. He had pressures from all over. The Jewish community persecuted him. The local Roman governments did not approve of his teachings. **Paul was not a popular man.** If we wanted a “police record” or a background check, I don’t know who would hire him? But listen how Paul expresses to this church:

But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. (1

Thessalonians 2:2-4 ESV)

Paul is very clear whom he is pleasing. He and his disciples, Silas, and Timothy were under persecution. Just before arriving to Thessalonica, they were in **Philippi.** Paul’s ministry was not easy. They were beaten, and then were put in jail. God used them in jail and the chief guard became a Christian (Read Acts 16). Nothing stopped them from pleasing God.

I think we will please people when we are insecure about ourselves or our convictions, when we do not have Christian principles and values to defend. My role as your pastor is to teach you about the **principles of a Christ-centered-life,** to teach you about **Christ,** to lead you to **have a transformed life.** When we are equipped with solid faith, we will be ready to face the temptation of pleasing people.

Paul writes to the church in Galatia saying:

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10 ESV)

These are very serious statements. Let us not take them lightly. Pleasing God and not people is a primary principle. Here I want to see Paul also as a man who faced temptation like all of us. Don’t you think Paul was tempted to please authorities to escape persecution? Do you think Paul was not afraid? Do you think Paul was a

macho guy like John Wayne? I don't think so. After Thessalonica, Paul moved to Corinth where God told him: **“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”** (Acts 18:9-10 ESV)

Why did God need to remind Paul not to be afraid, not to be silent? “Paul, go and speak... I am with you...” I wonder if Paul was praying to God saying that he was tired of all these persecutions and oppositions. As a result of his daily prayer, God is encouraging Paul.

What I learn from Paul is this. **His trust was not on himself. His trust was on God.** I need to remind myself of this principle often.

If you have a fear that is bothering you, why not open up to God. God will walk with you with your fears.

2. Paul did not misuse his position.

For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 2:5-6 ESV)

Barouyr Sevag the Armenian poet had poetry about this:

Մարդ կա՝ ելել է շալակն աշխարհի,
Մարդ կա՝ աշխարհն է շալակած տանում... Պարոյր Սեւակ

Translation: There are two kinds of people: People who are a burden to the world and people who carry the burden of the world. Barouyr Sevag

I sometimes wonder, “Am I becoming a burden on my church?” Not only the pastor will ask this, any of us in leadership can ask this. Do I have many demands?

I, or any leader, or anyone of us should be careful not to misuse the authority that is given to us. This is my 31st year serving the Lord in different locations. I tried my best not to be a burden on my congregation.

Paul repeats the idea of pleasing God saying that he did not seek glory from them.

Please do not mix this with **encouragement**. Everybody enjoys being encouraged for having done a good job. It is a biblical command **to exhort and encourage each other**. God encouraged Moses. God encouraged Joshua. God encouraged David in the cave. **The problem starts when we seek encouragement rather than letting encouragement come to us.**

If we are seeking praise from people, this will lead us to misuse our role as leaders. Even if you are not a leader, please stop seeking recognition from others. It is exhausting for you and for others. **Instead of a blessing you become a burden.**

Illustration: to preach every Sunday is a tough thing to do. To be bold, biblical, spiritually ready, creative, charismatic, and full of the Holy Spirit. Usually I don't know what the sermon did in people's lives. Suddenly an email comes saying, "Badveli, that sermon spoke to me and God is working in my life."

Or as a congregation, you can be not a burden but an encouragement. Continue to encourage each other. I hear from you these sentences saying to each other: "That day you called me. Thank you for remembering me in your prayers. Thanks for the visit..." Those are important things of the body of Christ. Please take time today and encourage someone from the congregation.

3. Paul Cared for His Congregation with a Parental Love.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 ESV)

We cared for you the way a mother cares for her children. We loved you dearly. Not content to just pass on the Message, we wanted to give you our hearts. And we *did*. (1 Thess 2:7-8 MSG)

Nursing Mother...

Notice how Paul approaches this church. He cares for them like a nursing mother.

-A nursing mother gives life to the infant. **Paul did this by sharing the Good News of the Gospel that gave new life to this church.**

-A nursing mother also **feeds the baby, nourishes her.** Paul does this by teaching the believers about Jesus. Paul also disciples them. He shared not just the message, but the Messenger; not just words, but lives; not just doctrines, but hearts.

Another word that Paul uses here to describe his love towards the church is: “affectionately desirous.” The Armenian word is *korovakout* գորովազուրթ . The Greek word is *homeiromai*, which means “to desire, long for, esp. the longing of love”³

What was the evidence of this kind of care and love? Paul gave his own self to them.

This is the best way to serve God. **Self-Giving LOVE.** Jesus said the genuine shepherd (not a hired one) gives himself for the flock. We cannot be “hired Christians” serving each other.

Paul even did not want to put financial burden on this community. He was a tentmaker. He had some income from that job. Although we see in his other letters that many churches did support the ministry, we find that he was careful not to misuse their giving. **For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.** (1 Thessalonians 2:9 ESV).

On the other hand, Paul realizes that the members of this church **had become very dear to them.** He has a love relationship with these people. It is not just a job Paul is doing; it is a vocation, serving them with joy and love; like a parent who will do everything not out of duty, but out of love.

It is difficult to love people. It is not easy to love the “unlovable.” CS Lewis describes how you can decide not to love, the result:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will not change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.” — (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*)²

Application:

Whom do you please? God or people?

What are the fears that keep you from pleasing God?

In your service for the Lord, do you know how to carry the burdens of others?

Do you have a self-giving love toward the people you serve?

Let us approach the table that the Lord prepared.

“Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer.” (John Piper)

1. Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*. P 136.

2. Greek Lexicon from Blue Bible

3 <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/3058-to-love-at-all-is-to-be-vulnerable-love-anything>

* Brennan once said: The greatest single cause of [atheism](#) in the world today is [Christians](#) who acknowledge [Jesus](#) with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle...