

If you turn there again, our sermon text tonight is 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 1 through 12. We set out four major headings as we began looking at the book of Thessalonians. Remember, our first major heading covered chapter 1, and that's Paul's Thanksgiving section.

This is very common. Most of Paul's letters begin with a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for what he's done in the church that he's writing to. Well, now we move to a part of the structure that is somewhat unique to Thessalonians. Normally we expect, you know, a nice clear doctrinal portion followed by a nice clear exhortation portion. That's not really what we get in Thessalonians. Instead, we have three other headings.

First, we have explanation. explanation, and that runs through chapters two and three, where Paul explains how the circumstance for why he had to leave so quickly, reminds them of their conduct among them, and so forth. And we'll get into that a little bit in our sermon tonight. And then the next section after that is exhortation, as Paul moves to explaining to the Thessalonians how they can please God. And finally, we have consolation, where we get to some of the passages that concern the coming of Christ, the second coming, as well as consolation for those whose loved ones have passed away. So we have thanksgiving, explanation, exhortation, and consolation. So tonight we're getting into explanation. Now, I didn't plan this.

Mac and I did not coordinate this, but you'll remember this morning, Mac's text from Titus, chapter one, was particularly dealing with false teachers. What are false teachers like? Why must we rebuke false teachers? And so we kind of got the negative side. Well, tonight, we're gonna be looking at the positive side. If that's what a false teacher is, if that's what characterizes a false ministry, what characterizes a Christ-like ministry? What characterized the ministry of the apostles?

So, let's find out what that is. Let's read this text together. Before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Our Father and our God, as we come to you this evening, we pray that you would open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things in your law. In Jesus' name, amen. Reading from 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 1 through 12. Reading in Jesus' name. For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

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. 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.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were eager to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 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 proclaim to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct towards you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

This is the word of the Lord. May he add his blessing to it. As we read this text, you'll notice that it almost seems like Paul is dialoguing with someone. It almost seems like we're hearing one half of a phone conversation. This is something we frequently find in Paul's epistles. Paul's epistles did not exist in a vacuum. Paul is often dealing with something, and that's kind of what we're seeing here. Paul is very likely addressing some accusations.

Now, we ought to be careful when we do this kind of what they call mirror reading. Mirror reading meaning you look into one end of the mirror and try to figure out what's on the other end. What is Paul actually addressing here? What's on the other side of the phone? We ought to be careful with that because we don't want to speculate too far.

But I don't think it's a major bit of speculation to say that Paul is answering objections, answering accusations about the character of their ministry when they're among the Thessalonians. And it does not appear that these accusations were coming from inside the church.

We'll read elsewhere how Timothy, when he came to Thessalonica, brought back a positive report. The Thessalonians love Paul, they're praying for him. Rather, these accusations are coming from outside the church. There are people telling the Thessalonians, you're following this Paul guy?

I mean, this guy, he seems sketchy. I mean, he showed up with this new fangled teaching, something I've never heard of before. And then as soon as persecution comes, he skips town? Wow, I don't know if I'd follow him. And even though the Thessalonians aren't exactly buying this, this kind of slander is harming their ministry. And so Paul wants to equip them with answers to these sorts of objections. You know, this is a lot of relevance for us.

I don't know if you've noticed, but in our world today, God's church is frequently under attack, not usually in America from coercive force in terms of physical attack, though that does occasionally happen. Most of the time, it's slander. The church of God is routinely slandered. We are told that the church of God is a scam. that these pastors are up here, they're trying to get your money. They're trying to get glory for themselves.

They're trying to mislead you. And that harms the church of God, does it not? Because if you can undermine the preacher, if you can undermine the minister, you undermine what he preaches. And if you undermine what he preaches, you undermine the gospel. You undermine the gospel, you undermine the church. Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't isn't some truth to these accusations, there are many false teachers that do follow these sorts of things, but how do we distinguish that?

How can we show that the true Christ-like minister is not a charlatan? That the true Christ-like minister is not in it for themselves? Well, that's what this text is addressing. It's also important so we're able to distinguish the false

ministry from the true ministry. And finally, it's important because, well, not all of us are called to full-time ministry. All of us are called to serve God, to minister in his church in some way. We all have gifts that aid God's church.

How do we look into our own hearts, our own lives, and discern whether our motivations, whether our ministry is truly Christ-like? Well, there are three aspects to the Christlike ministry that Paul lays out in this chapter, and that's what I really want to focus on this evening. I want you to be able to recognize the Christlike ministry. Recognize the Christlike ministry. So first, the Christlike ministry, the first thing Paul lays out here is that the Christlike ministry is divisive. The Christ-like ministry is divisive. Seems like a strange thing to begin with, but that's where Paul begins. Look at verse one of chapter two.

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 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. So Paul begins here by talking about how their ministry was not in vain. Now when Paul talks about his ministry not being in vain, he's talking specifically about the nature of their ministry.

Their ministry was not empty. They had real content to share. They had real motivations. They would not come with a sort of empty ministry. They came with a full ministry. In the words of one commentator, they came not to gain something, but to give something. And that's one reason why their ministry was divisive. They had something to say. They had something to say.

You know, it's easy to be likable. It's easy to not rub anyone the wrong way if you come into a room and really have nothing to say. And there's actually some wisdom in that in some instances. Proverbs talks about how even a fool is considered wise if he keeps his mouth shut. That's my paraphrase. That's a proverb. That's true. But it's true. If you want to keep the peace, if you want to keep from being divisive, just don't say anything. Just don't come with any content. Figure out what everyone else is saying and say what they're saying. And there are many that will do that. But that is not the Christ-like minister. The Christ-like minister has something to say.

And that's the first thing Paul wants to lay out here. He says, we came with a message. And that message is really the message we talked about in our last study. The message of Jesus Christ, who he is, the Son of God, raised from the dead, who delivers us from the coming wrath. And how does Paul prove that he came with a real ministry, a full ministry? Well, he goes back to the persecution. He says, after we had already suffered and been shamefully treated in Philippi. What's he talking about there? Well, we read about that as we're reading through the book of Acts in Acts chapter 16. Remember, Paul and Silas, as they're making their way through Greece in this ministry, through Macedonia, I think, particularly, They're in Philippi, and they are arrested on false charges.

And having been arrested, they were beaten with, again, no trial, simply by hearsay, and then thrown into prison. This was a message they had suffered for. They'd also been shamefully treated. It's revealed after In the next day, when the council says you guys can leave, Paul says, you realize you just beat a couple of Roman citizens without trial? That's the shameful treatment he's talking about. They had been denied their rights.

And in fact, the Roman government was so, the Roman governor in the city was so, was so in fear about this, because you could lose your head for doing something like that to a Roman citizen without a trial, that he asked,

that he personally came and asked them, hey, please leave peacefully. Don't, don't get me in trouble. So this was a message that Paul had gotten into significant trouble for. Paul and Silas had. They had suffered. They had been denied their rights. And yet, as soon as they reached Thessalonica, what did they do? Paul tells us, we had boldness in our God to proclaim the gospel in the midst of much conflict. It happened all over again, but it didn't matter because they had something to say. Friends, the true Christ-like minister doesn't come with some nice ideas for how you can live your life better. He doesn't come with advice for how you can have a better family. He doesn't come with 10 tips to manage your personal finances.

He comes with a life-giving message, a message that is about life and death, a message that is about the wrath of God, a message that matters. He has something to say. Doesn't mean you don't touch on those other things. Obviously God's word talks about those, so we do talk about those, but that is not the major thrust of the message. The true Christ-like minister has something to say. The true Christ-like minister also has something to oppose. Something to oppose. Why was it that everywhere Paul and Silas went, they had persecution? They had persecution in Philippi. They had persecution in Thessalonica. They had persecution in Berea. Why was that?

Well, go back to the nature of the message, how you turned from idols to serve the living and true God. The message of the gospel, yes, is to turn to Jesus, but it's also to turn away from idols. The true Christ-like minister does not simply preach positively, he often preaches negatively. Because to turn to Christ is to turn exclusively to Christ. This is something that came out particularly in a story I heard from an evangelist. He was on a preaching tour in India. And as he was preaching, he didn't speak the native language, and so he had to have a translator. who was translating his message.

And the message is going really well. Everyone's really excited. He has a huge turnout. There are people that want to come forward, want to accept Jesus, and it's amazing. And then the translator says, hey, can I say something to them quick? The guy's like, all right. He figures he's going to make some kind of announcement or something. He talks for a good few minutes. And all of a sudden, half the people in the room leave. And the evangelist tells this translator, what did you tell them? What's going on? Well, sir, you have to understand, this is India.

These people serve all kinds of gods, hundreds of gods. And they've been hearing this message about Jesus. He sounds like a really cool god. What I told them was, if you're going to serve Jesus, if you're going to devote your life to Jesus Christ, you must put away all other gods.

And at that, all of a sudden the message became less popular. Because the true Christ-like minister has something to oppose. And that makes him divisive. Does your Christ-like minister oppose your idols? That's a question to ask yourself. Do you, when you engage in whatever ministry you might, do you oppose idols? You're either in the kingdom of God or in the kingdom of the evil one. There is no neutrality. To preach the kingdom of Jesus Christ is to empty the kingdom of Satan. You have something to oppose.

The Christ-like minister, yes, has something to say, he has something to oppose, and he has someone to please. He is divisive because he has someone to please. Look at verse three, 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. The Christ-like minister is not ultimately

concerned with pleasing his people, he's ultimately concerned with pleasing his God. Now, there are three words that Paul uses to describe this.

He says, we did not come to you with error, that is a moral error, an error of their motivations. We didn't come with impurity. Remember, Mack talked about impurity this morning, those impure motives. And we didn't come to deceive the outworking of those impure motives.

Why? because we had someone to please. He says, if we were ultimately concerned with pleasing you, if Paul and Silas' ultimate concern was to please the Thessalonians, then flattery would make a lot of sense. Deception might even make a lot of sense. But that's not what he set out to do. Friends, the Christlike minister's primary concern is not to be liked, it's to preach the whole counsel of God.

He is an under-shepherd. And just as a shepherd's primary, primary job is not to make sure all his sheep are happy. No, what's the shepherd's primary job? The under-shepherd's job is to feed his sheep and to protect them from wolves. That is the role of a shepherd.

And notice I say he's an under-shepherd. Why does he do those things? Why does he care for the flock? Yes, he loves the flock, but he does so because he is one who has to answer to someone. He's an under-shepherd. He has a stewardship. The flock is not his own. It is not his flock. It is God's flock. You are merely under his charge. That is the Christlike minister.

He has someone to please. And that can often make him divisive. If his goal is to please you, if his goal is to be well-liked, he'll never be divisive. Why would he ever be divisive? He wants to make sure everyone's happy. But that's not his primary goal. It's not his primary mission. He has someone to please. So the Christ-like ministry is divisive. You need to recognize the Christ-like ministry, and you can recognize it first and foremost because it is often divisive. Second, the Christ-like ministry is sacrificial. Christ-like ministry is sacrificial.

Look with me at verse 5. Again at verse five. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed. God is witness. The first way in which the Christ-like ministry is sacrificial, it is financially sacrificial. The Christ-like ministry is financially sacrificial. Now I know this, anytime you talk about finances, the room gets a little more tense. That's just the way it is. It's the way we are as people. And it's not necessarily a terrible thing, but the Bible addresses it. We have to talk about it. And that is true of the Christ-like ministry.

The Christ-like ministry is the Christ-like minister is not ultimately concerned with profit. Profit is not his concern. Most other trades are concerned with profit, and rightfully so. If you own a business, you check your ledger and you want to stay in the black. And if you're not in the black, you make a change. That is not the primary concern of the Christlike minister. The Christlike minister is not concerned with making money.

And this is one of the most obvious ways you can pick out a charlatan. They're all over the place. They always have been. We read about it all the time in the epistles of Paul. We read about it this morning in Titus. And it continued to

plague the church. You read the records from the medieval church. What was one of the number one issues they had to deal with? Simony, where you have someone where there's a new parish that opened up. The pastor there died. Who wants it? I'm here in \$10. Give me \$20. Give me \$30.

They were selling offices in the church. they saw godliness as a means for gain. And that continued. You could see that in the cults that formed in the 19th century. How many of those were someone trying to make a quick buck, trying to exploit people's seeking after God, people's trust in them, often their own sinful desires, exploiting them for their own gain. And we see it today in the prosperity gospel.

How many of those preachers will get up on Sunday morning and will say, hey. You want God to bless you? You want to receive the gift of God? You want to see God make you prosperous? Give me money. I know you only have \$500 to your name, and you have all these debts, but you give me that \$500, and I promise you, God is gonna multiply that tenfold. Sow a seed now, and it'll be great.

And they see godliness as a means for gain. You talk to some of these people, and they have sprawling mansions. That is not the Christ-like ministry. That is the ministry of Satan. Godliness is not a means of gain. The Christ-like minister knows that Christ-like ministry is financially sacrificial. Contrast the image of that, the prosperity preacher, with the image of Paul. Look what Paul says about his own ministry in verse nine. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil. We worked night and day that we might not be a burden on any of you who have proclaimed the gospel of God.

Paul and Silas they didn't accept any pay while they were in Thessalonica. That wasn't their normal practice. That wasn't the practice where they had for when a church called a pastor to them. They expected payment then. But when they were first proclaiming the gospel, when they were first bringing the gospel to Thessalonians, they said, don't give us any money.

We don't need any money. We'll work for our own food because we want to show you that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not about money. It's not about gain. We're not in it for ourselves. We're in it to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are willing to sacrifice our labor to his glory. The true Christ-like ministry is sacrificial. It is financially sacrificial. It is also humbly sacrificial. It is humbly sacrificial. Look at verse six.

Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. Paul, if anyone could have asked for attention, asked for honor from people in God's church, it would have been the Apostle Paul. But he didn't. If not even the apostles were in it for their own glory, demanded honor and dignity from others, how dare any elder demand that kind of honor and dignity? That doesn't mean that the people of God don't owe some respect to their leadership. Obviously they do.

But demanding honors, demanding that you be praised, demanding that you be treated as some higher being, that is no place in the Christlike ministry. The Christlike ministry is humbly sacrificial. It's humbly sacrificial. This branch of un-Christlike ministry, this pseudo-Christlike ministry is much more difficult to pin down, isn't it? I think it's often much more rampant in the church.

I think a lot of people understand that if you want to make money, you don't go into ministry. A lot of people understand that, but a lot of people, a lot of people understand that, hey, There's glory to be gotten. I mean, after all, it's positional authority. I'm seen as an authority in the community. I get to get a captive audience every week. They have to listen to everything I say. And that can be attractive to some people. And what Paul is saying is that is not the Christ-like ministry. The Christ-like minister is never concerned with his own glory, his own dignity. He's concerned with the glory of God. It's humble.

It's laying down your life. One great litmus test I heard from a pastor is imagine that you get to the church and Sunday morning you enter the bathroom and it's a complete and total mess. It's an hour before the service. You clean the bathroom. You don't make that a regular part of your deal. Obviously a church should have a janitorial staff and all that. You have other responsibilities you need to do. But you are not above that work. You are humble. You are a minister of Christ. Just a little litmus test. So the Christ-like ministry is sacrificial. It is financially sacrificial. It is humbly sacrificial. And it is personally sacrificial. Look what he says in verse seven.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. This is the first of two family metaphors that Paul brings in. gentle among you, like a nursing mother." Every time I read that, I can't get a conversation I had with my sister out of my head. We were talking, and she was talking about when she first became a mother, and she said, I tell you what, being a mother is one of the most humbling, sacrificial things you'll ever do.

You give everything. Your time is not your own. Any minute, Your kids might need something any minute your little one might cry. It is personally sacrificial. You give all of yourself. Not even your own body is yours when you're a nursing mother. You give of your own body to that child.

That's the image of the Christlike minister. He gives his whole self. Look what Paul says in verse eight, so in that way, being affectionately desirous of you, we're ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. That's the Christ-like minister. Friends, a minister, the Christ-like minister, is not just a teacher. He gives his whole self, and that shows up in the way he preaches, It shows up in the way he visits. It shows up in the way he does all his work. He doesn't clock out. He gives his whole self. It is sacrificial. How do you recognize the Christlike ministry? The Christlike ministry is often divisive. It is always sacrificial. And the Christlike ministry, third and finally, is fatherly. It's fatherly. Look at verse 10. You are witnesses and God also. How holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct towards you believers, for you know how, like a father with his children. Hold on there just a second. Like a father with his children.

Why is it that the office of elder is so often compared with the office of a father? This isn't unique to First Thessalonians. If you remember in Titus 1, you can also see the parallel in First Timothy 3, One of the qualifications for an elder is that he be a good father. He take care of his home. Paul's reasoning is if one cannot care for his own household, how can he care for the household of God? It's compared to the office of a father. Why is that?

Well, in the ancient world, as in now, a father serves two primary roles. Well, three roles. He's a leader, obviously, but he expresses that leadership. In his instruction, yes, we'll get to that in a moment, but also in his example. A father is to be an example to his children.

I could turn to all kinds of different country songs on that. There's an oldie but a goodie. I'm seeing my father in me. I'm seeing my father in me. I guess that's how it's meant to be. I find I'm more and more like him each day. I notice I walk the way he walks. I notice I talk the way he talks. I'm starting to see my father in me.

We relate to that song because it's true of all of us. All of us, I think, can say, we see our father in us. And that's how it's meant to be in the church. The elder is to be an example to his flock. Notice what Paul says about this, about his conduct.

He says, it's holy, righteous, and blameless. Again, stacking up those three words to get at one major concept, that they were blameless. They were not perfect. Obviously, Paul isn't claiming that he has attained sinless perfection, but that his conduct corresponded with his office. It corresponded with the God he served. Truly. Not perfectly, but truly.

And then he says, as you know, you are witness. He says that over and over again throughout the passage. He understands he is an example. They're to see that conduct. They're to imitate that conduct. And that's, again, one of the chief ways, as Matt laid out this morning, you can point out a false teacher. Jesus said, what did Jesus say when asked, how do you sniff out a false teacher? He said, you will know them by their fruits. Do figs grow from thorn bushes? Are olives from a bramble? Look at the person's life.

Are they an example? Do you see Christ in them? It's kind of in the name, Christ-like minister. So the Christ-like ministry, it's fatherly and that's an example. It's also fatherly in how you give instruction. Look again at verse 11. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and glory. Exhorted you like a father with his children. What is unique about the kind of exhortation a father gives?

Well, it carries authority. Remember when I was growing up, you know, if mom said something, obviously you obeyed and it was a big deal. But if dad said it, it was a big deal. My dad had this way, he still has this way, he can snap and you can hear it from across the room. And all of us kids still like, what was that? When you have examples like that in your own lives, it's authoritative.

A father's instruction is authoritative, but more than that, it's tender. It's tender. It's born out of love. Love for his children. But not only is the instruction from the elder fatherly in that it is authoritative and in that it is tender. Obviously, it has to be both of those things. but it's also, it ultimately comes from our Heavenly Father.

Notice what Paul says at the end here. He says, we exhorted you, each one of you, and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and glory. And you might ask, but

wait a second, how does God call us to his own kingdom and glory? I thought it was the preacher that was, in this passage, Paul in this passage, that was calling people to repentance, calling people to live a worthy life.

Well, that's the point. The preacher's call is God's call. God calls us to his own kingdom and glory through the Christ-like minister. That's why the Christ-like minister's ministry is fatherly, because it comes ultimately from our Heavenly Father. That's what gives it its authority. And ultimately, that's what gives it its tenderness, its love. That's the Christlike ministry. How do you recognize the Christlike ministry? Well, you recognize the Christlike ministry, first and foremost, because it's often divisive.

You got something to say, something to oppose. And the priest is not ultimately concerned with pleasing you. It's always sacrificial. It is not in it for the money, not in it for the glory. You give all of yourself to the glory of God. And the Christ-like ministry is fatherly. It sets an example and teaches with the authority and the tenderness of our Heavenly Father. Now, obviously, all of these attributes are not going to be present in every Christ-like minister perfectly. None of us are perfect. but they all need to be present. Again, not perfectly, but truly. One final remark before we close. Notice throughout this I've been saying this is the Christ-like ministry. All of these attributes, all of these things that are a part of this ministry are merely a pale reflection of the ministry of Jesus. Think about Jesus' ministry.

It was divisive. I came not to bring peace, but a sword. It was sacrificial to the highest degree. He didn't just give his life. Metaphorically, he literally gave his life for his church. And it was certainly fatherly. He is the everlasting father. Not in the sense that where you say that Jesus is somehow God the father. God the father and God the son are both God, but Christ is not the father. Ask me about that later if you're interested. It's important, but it's certainly fatherly in that it carries that authority. He speaks from the Father, and he speaks with tenderness and love of a father. That is Jesus. And on our best days, the Christ-like minister is but a pale reflection of that.

Let's pray. Our Father and our God, when we read texts like this, we're humbled. because we look at ourselves in and of ourselves. We realize how much we fall short. Lord, forgive us. Forgive us, Lord. Make us, make all of us more like this Christ-like minister. And Lord, help us through this passage to be able to spot those who pretend, those pseudo ministers. and also to answer the accusations of the enemy. Help us, Lord Jesus, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.