**1 Thessalonians 2:5-8**

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**Traits of Spiritual Leaders Part 1**

***5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.***

* Here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 we are in the part of Paul’s letter in which he is forced . . . by the false and spurious accusations of his enemies . . . to defend his actions and motives while ministering to the new believers in Thessalonica.
* In my last message, covering v. 1-4, we saw Paul’s strong denial that he came to them with “empty hands” and “empty pockets,” hoping to enrich himself at their expense.
  + We also saw Paul’s strong statement that he, Silas and Timothy were both ***approved*** and ***examined by God*** . . . meaning that God had **purified and validated** the faith of the three men through **the fire of suffering and affliction**.
* This morning we continue our examination of chapter 2 as Paul continues his lengthy defense of himself, Silas and Timothy in regard to their motives and their actions among the believers while in Thessalonica.
  + This is a very personal defense against the hateful and evil accusations against him. But **this passage is also very helpful and instructive regarding the negative and positive traits of spiritual leaders.**
  + In fact, after considering what Paul is teaching here . . . and the lengths he goes to in his description of the negative and positive traits of spiritual leaders and leadership, **I have come to the conclusion that this passage is both an apologetic . . . a personal defense of himself . . . and a polemic . . . an argument in support of . . . what constitutes true, biblical church leadership.**
* The reason I believe that Paul is using this opportunity to defend himself and to provide instruction to the church is because of his use of terms that indicate the Thessalonians already knew that the accusations against Paul, Silas and Timothy were false.
  + In 1 Thessalonians 1:5 Paul says of the accusations against him . . .

***1 Thessalonians 1:5— just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.***

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* + In 1 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul begins his defense of himself with the statement . . .

***1 Thessalonians 2:1— For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,***

* + Paul goes on in 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 9, 10 & 11 to say . . .

***1 Thessalonians 2:5— For we never came with flattering speech, as you know,*** in v. 9 . . .***For you recall . . .*** in v. 10 . . . ***You are witnesses*** . . . and in v. 11 . . . ***just as you know***.

* + My point is that here in his personal defense in chapter 2 **Paul is not telling them something they didn’t know. He is reminding them of things they already knew to be true.**
    - So while he is making a defense of himself in this chapter, I believe that Paul is using this personal defense as a teaching opportunity to explain what true, biblical leaders and leadership look like.

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**Three negative accusations**

***For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others***

* So, with that in mind, let’s examine Paul’s evidence here in chapter 2.
* Paul begins this section, as he did the previous one, by **first refuting** the accusations against him.
  + He begins by stating in v. 5-6 . . . ***For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness* [God knows!]*—6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others*** . . . .
  + Here in v. 5-6 we see **3 accusations made against Paul . . . *flattery, greed and* a desire for *self-glory***.
  + In these three accusations we see Paul’s **personal motives being assailed** . . . that he was seeking to use his ministry to deceive the Thessalonians while enriching himself and building his own prestige.
* This style of making a logical argument is one that Paul is well-known for. Having been trained as a Pharisee, Paul was a master of logic and debate. As a student of Gameliel, Paul was one of the prize pupils . . . gifted in his knowledge of the law and able to debate exceptionally well.
  + As we find in Paul’s other writings, he makes a masterful argument, first beginning with a presentation and refutation of the negative accusations, followed by a presentation of the positive attributes that he demonstrated.
  + We saw last time, in v. 3, that Paul first began with a refutation of the **three negative** **purposes** **of his teaching . . . that he was guilty of doctrinal *error, impure* motives and willful *deceit***.
  + Likewise, here **in v. 5-6 Paul begins his defense by defending against three negative accusations of his personal motives . . . that he was attempting to deceive the Thessalonians and enrich himself by using *flattery* to cover his *greedy* desires for *self-glory***.
* And although Paul is refuting the accusations being made against himself, Silas and Timothy, **here in v. 5-6 Paul is giving us very insightful instruction into the actions and motives of false shepherds.**
* Here in v. 5-6 Paul uses three Greek terms that have a stronger connotation than we might realize.
  + When most people think of the definition of the term ***flattering speech***, they probably think of someone who goes overboard in his or her effusive praise or flattery, but without an overt evil motive.
    - Most of us use ***flattering speech*** on occasion. Often our **flattery** occurs in complimenting someone, especially if we know that someone is wearing a new dress or suit.
  + But with his use of this term, Paul is not referring to people who may be a bit overly-effusive with their praise. The term ***flattering speech***, as Paul uses it here, refers to **people who use *flattering speech* for the purpose of manipulating and gaining a selfish advantage over others**.
    - A person who uses ***flattering speech*** is using that ***flattering speech*** **to benefit himself** . . . like the subordinate who continually flatters the boss in order to ingratiate him or herself for the purpose of furthering his or her own career . . . or like the car salesman who continually flatters you by telling you how great you look in that new car, because he or she is hoping for a nice commission on the sale. **It’s purely selfish and self-serving manipulation**.
    - And by his use of this term Paul is expressing his great disdain for people who seek to manipulate other people with their ***flattering speech***. And the reason for Paul’s great disdain for such people is because **he continually dealt with and disputed with such people who sought to deceive others.**
  + ***Flattering speech*** is the *modus operandi* of people who use manipulation as their primary means of achieving their goals.
    - If a person begins a statement with the phrase, *“Hey, you’re a smart guy”* or *“you’re a smart woman,”* the warning bells in your brain should start going off loudly*.* Whether you are a “smart guy” or “smart woman” has no bearing on what this person is trying to manipulate you into doing or believing.
    - ***Flattering speech*** is pure manipulation . . . for one purpose . . . to get you to do or believe something that that person wants you to do or believe.
    - And here in this verse Paul is adamantly denying that he used any form of manipulation to cajole the Thessalonians into believing the gospel message he was preaching to them.
* The **second negative term** Paul uses is in the phrase ***a pretext for greed***. The term ***pretext*** is very descriptive of the **hidden motives** of greedy people.
  + A ***pretext for greed*** is **one of** **the ultimate purposes for which people use** ***flattering speech***.
  + Paul’s description is right on the money. **Greedy people don’t make their true intentions known** because they want to give **the appearance of having noble intentions**.
  + Greedy people work very hard at appearing to be humble and helpful so as to provide cover for their true motives.
    - A car salesman does continually tell you how great you look in that new car because he or she has any care for you. The salesman is cloaking his or her greed under the guise of his or her ***flattering speech*** . . . seeming to have your interests in mind, while really only having his or her own commission in mind.
* In the professing church, **false shepherds manifest this same self-serving behavior.**
  + **False teachers and false shepherds use deceptive *flattering speech* to cloak their own greedy motives.**
  + In the early 1990’s there was a major scandal involving the televangelist, Robert Tilton. Tilton had built an 8,000 member church and had a large television ministry built on the prosperity gospel. Tilton encouraged his television audience to send him their prayer requests to that he could pray for them . . . a noble gesture. But the scandal resulted when it was discovered that while thousands of people who were writing to Tilton with prayer requests and giving generous donations, Tilton’s staff was opening the letters, keeping the donations, while callously discarding the unread prayer requests. It was discovered that Tilton’s ministry took in $80 million a year before this fraud was discovered and exposed.
  + This self-proclaimed spiritual leader was using ***flattering speech*** . . . the promise of prosperity and blessing from God . . . as a ***pretext for his greed***.
* The third negative phrase Paul uses, in v. 6, is that of ***seeking glory from men***.
  + Here in this phrase Paul cites **the second major motivation for *flattering speech*** . . . **false teachers and false shepherds have a desire for adulation and personal *glory from men***.
  + Again, using the ***flattering speech*** of **false doctrine, false teachers and false shepherds seek not only to grow their personal fortunes, but also to stroke their growing egos by growing the influence of their voices and the size of their congregations.**
  + But, unfortunately, history records that many of the modern mega-churches have been built upon either a watered-down gospel or no gospel at all. In other words, a greart many mega-churches are built on the ***flattering speech*** of men who proceed from **greedy motives of monetary gain and personal prestige from the adulation of the world.**
* But, lest we think that the level of deception and evil motives is unique to our most recent generations, listen to these words from King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1:9 . . .

***Ecclesiastes 1:9— That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.***

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* + In other words, what is happening today has happened many times before, because ***there is nothing new under the sun*** . . . there are no new thoughts or motives that men seek to deceive and defraud one another. There is only technology that has enabled modern men and women to deceive many.
  + But the fact is, the motives and methods of modern false teachers are the same now as they have been in every generation. Only technology has enabled modern false teachers to reach so many people at once.
  + The notorious charlatans of today employ the same deceptive techniques that Simon the Magician did in Paul’s time. Greed and self-glory are the primary motivations of every false teacher in every generation.

slide 5

**Paul’s God-given right as an apostle**

* Having strongly denied the use of ***flattering speech*** to achieve the nefarious motives of ***greed and self-glory***, Paul then makes an interesting statement at the end of v. 6 . . . ***even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.***
* From this passage and other passages in Scripture we learn that Paul was careful not to be a financial burden on the new churches that he established during his missionary journeys. The reason for this was two-fold:
  + First, as we see here in this passage, Paul did not want to give the enemies of Christ any opportunity to bring an accusation of ***greed*** against Paul.
    - If he accepted no financial offering from a church, how could he be accused of profiting from them?
  + Second, knowing that many of the early brethren were of the slave class and lower class, Paul did not want to impose a financial burden upon them.
  + Yet, despite his efforts to avoid being a financial burden, God provided for Paul’s needs in many ways. One of the tangible ways God provided for Paul was by the generosity of churches that were financially blessed . . . specifically the church in Philippi . . . as we see in 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 . . .

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***2 Corinthians 11:7-9— 7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? 8  I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; 9 and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.***

* + Here in this passage Paul says, sarcastically, in v. 8 that ***I robbed other churches***.
    - Forced to defend himself in Corinth, as he did to the Thessalonians, Paul is able to refute any accusation of personal gain by pointing out that he received no financial benefit from the Corinthian church, despite having been with them for **a year and half**.
    - In all his time with the Corinthians, Paul’s financial support was provided solely by his own labors as a tent maker and from the love offerings of other churches . . . specifically the Philippian church.
  + Such evidence is ample to defend Paul from any accusation that he financially benefitted in any way from his efforts as a missionary.

slide 7

**The positive attributes of a spiritual leader**

***v. 7— But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.***

* Then, having defined and defended himself from three accusations, Paul then proceeds to lay out the **positive attributes and actions** that his mission team demonstrated toward the Thessalonians.
* He begins by describing **the very personal friendship that grew** between the missionaries and the Thessalonian believers . . . ***7*** ***but we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.***
* **Far from** asserting their authority as apostles of Jesus Christ and becoming a financial burden upon the people, Paul states that they were **just the opposite . . . *but we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children***.
  + With this description in v. 7, Paul describes how he and the others with him went out of their way to not only avoid becoming a burden, but they **proved to be a great help**.
* The image that Paul uses to describe their actions in Thessalonica is that of a ***nursing mother*** . . . a nourisher.
  + The implication of this image is that **those being nourished are unable to nourish themselves** . . . **babies.**
  + And being like a ***nursing mother***, the new Thessalonian believers were completely dependent upon Paul for their spiritual nourishment and growth. Paul’s mission team was the source of their spiritual sustenance.
* In addition to the image of a ***nursing mother*** that Paul uses here, another image that comes to mind here is the one the Lord Jesus employs in John 10 . . . **the Good Shepherd**.
  + In the examples of the ***nursing mother*** and **the Good Shepherd**, the image that immediately emerges is of **the tender care** that both **mothers and shepherds** demonstrate.
* It is quite intentional that the Lord uses the image of sheep to describe Christians. In many ways, sheep are like small children.
  + They get lost easily. And if they wander away and get lost, they are unable to find their way back to the flock.
  + Like mothers, shepherds have to feed their sheep. Sheep are unable to find good pasture on their own. They have to be led to good pasture. And if not watched carefully, sheep will eat things that are bad for them.
  + Shepherds have to take care that the sheep don’t drink unsafe water, because they will.
  + Like young children, sheep are defenseless. They are totally incapable of defending themselves from predators. It is the role of both the ***nursing mother*** and the shepherd to defend their charges. Without them, both will be exposed to great danger.
* So, here in v. 7, Paul uses the imagery of a ***nursing mother*** to describe the tenderness with which he and his companions behaved while in Thessalonica. But in v. 8 Paul explains that his attitudes and actions were not born out of a sense of duty or obligation, but out of a personal affection for the Thessalonians. Paul states in v. 8 . . . ***having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.***

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* One of the amazing traits that we see in the apostle Paul is the obvious love that he has for the people he ministered to. While Paul accepted his commission and obligation from the Lord to carry the gospel far and wide, it is quite apparent that Paul did not do so reluctantly.
  + Despite being terribly mistreated and persecuted wherever he went, Paul was also richly rewarded during his travels to see tens of thousands of people saved by God.
  + And just as each of us has great affection for the people who evangelized us, so the Thessalonians loved Paul and Silas and Timothy. And these missionaries love them back, equally.
* As they remained in Thessalonica, preaching and teaching the new converts, the close personal friendships that grew between them were a sweet blessing of God upon His people.
  + Even in the midst of opposition and persecution, Paul experienced the great joy of seeing unbelievers becoming brothers and sisters in the Lord.
* One of the phenomena that we have all experienced is the immediate affection that believers have for one another. One of the things that God gives to each of us when He saves us is an affection for other brothers and sisters. It is a gift of God that we are drawn to other members of our heavenly family.
  + It is a gift of God that causes us not only to have an immediate connection and affection to other Christians, but it is also a gift of God that we feel drawn to help one another.
  + This affection that Christians have for one another is not something that naturally occurs. It supernaturally occurs. We love one another, as Christians, because we see Christ in one another and because we love Christ.
  + That is what Paul is saying here in v. 8 . . . ***having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.***
  + Having come to them from Philippi, where they had been badly beaten, Paul and Silas immediately begin the word of proclaiming the gospel to the Thessalonians, not knowing if they would receive further punishment for their efforts.
* This desire to serve the Lord, even in the midst of their pain and suffering, are hallmarks of true servants of Christ.
  + Far from being opportunists who came to the Thessalonians with ***flattering words for the pretext of greed*** and seeking ***self-glory***, Paul and Silas and Timothy served God because it was their calling.
* The fact that Paul and Silas and Timothy were willing to continue preaching the gospel, even in the face of great personal danger, is evidence that they were truly called by God.
  + The fact that they were willing to put themselves in danger in service to the Lord is evidence that they were truly called as under-shepherds. We see the difference between those who are truly called by God and those who are not in John 10 . . .

***John 10:10-13— 10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”***

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* + In v. 12-13 we see the reason Paul and Silas and Timothy did not abandon their mission . . . they were not merely opportunistic ***hired hands***, who served only while it benefitted them. They were truly under-shepherds who loved the sheep as their own and were willing to give and impart their lives to the sheep that God would send to them.
* Think about what the Lord was doing. He was leading Paul from town to town. Paul, the under-shepherd would enter a town or city and begin preaching. And then God would begin calling men and women to salvation.
  + So, in effect, Paul entered every town or city as a shepherd with no sheep. And in every town God would call out the sheep and they would begin to follow Paul’s leading. And in every town and city, by the time Paul left, a new flock had been formed and other under-shepherds were called and trained to lead them.
  + But despite the fact that there were many flocks that Paul never saw again, he always prayed for them and never stopped loving them or having concern for them.
  + Think about how many flocks of sheep God formed under the ministry of Paul. Hundreds. Perhaps thousands. Accomplished by God’s work and the faithful service of Paul.

slide 10

**How should churches find their pastors and elders?**

* One of the questions that arises when it comes to church leadership . . . that is, the men who will shepherd the church . . . is, “what criteria should be used in finding our next pastors or elders?”
* As I was doing some research on this subject, I came across some interesting information regarding the rate of turnover among men in ministry. There are many different statistics regarding pastoral tenure. According to one writer that is cited in several publications, Thom Rainer, the current average tenure of a pastor in a protestant church is **slightly more than 2 years.**
  + That’s the average. That means for every pastor who remains in a church for 10 years or more, there are many pastors who remain in a church for only 1 or 2 years.
  + I find that statistic appalling. **Two years!** Some pastors barely have time to unpack their moving boxes before it is time to pack up again and move on to somewhere new.
* Though Rainer lists several reasons for this surprisingly short average tenure, several caught my eye.

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* + **The top three reasons Rainer lists for a pastor’s brief tenure in a church are:**
    - **First**, the honeymoon was over from the church’s perspective.
    - **Second**, the honeymoon was over from the pastor’s perspective.
    - And **third**, a job offer was received for a position at a bigger church, for more money.
* But is it is the top two reasons, listed above, that caught my eye . . . the phrase, **the honeymoon was over**. In other words, once the congregation and pastor got to know one another, one or both came to the realization that they weren’t happy or didn’t get what they thought they were getting.
  + Why is this? Because churches too often look at the wrong criteria when searching for a pastor. Pastoral search committees pour over resumes listing academic credentials and work history. They listen to sermons. They interview candidates by phone and in person.
  + But the one thing . . . and the most important thing . . . that is often left out of the search process is discovering if the man they are considering is **a good shepherd**.
    - In other words, is the man they are considering a **true shepherd or only a hireling.**
* Compare this process of considering a group of virtually unknown men to lead your church with the process by which the elders and deacons are selected.
  + According to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 there is strict and specific criteria that should be used to evaluate a man for church leadership. And if a church is following biblical principles, the congregation will recognize and follow qualified leaders.
  + So why don’t churches use the same process to appoint their pastors?
* Seminaries are pretty good at what they do . . . they impart academic knowledge. But one of the things that seminaries **aren’t so good at is making men into shepherds**.
  + As much as they may strive to prepare men for ministry, seminaries don’t do a very good job of training men to be shepherds. And the main reason for this is because **you can’t teach compassion and a love for the sheep. Either you have it or you don’t. But a true desire to love and minister to the sheep is something that God gives.**
* When I was in seminary I met men who didn’t appear to have God’s calling to be shepherds. I met some young men . . . some of whom had only recently graduated from college . . . and asked them about why they decided to go to seminary. I was surprised at the number who saw seminary as a path toward “a job.”
  + In other words, for some men, going to seminary was not a calling, but a career decision. Sadly, such men are not the exception. They are far too common.
* I believe that the best way a church can find the man they want to lead and teach and shepherd them is to choose a man **from among them** who is qualified to be a pastor-shepherd.
* One of our own pastors, Pastor Matt, is a perfect example. Matt and Katie came to us 5 years ago, when Matt entered seminary.
  + Matt and Katie became members of our congregation and have served and lived faithfully among us. We know Matt. We’ve come under his teaching and have come to appreciate that he is a skilled teacher.
  + And 2 years ago, based upon his demonstrated leadership and shepherding skills, we selected him to be an elder. But we waited for 3 years after he came to us to appoint him as an elder. **Why?** Because we wanted to be fully confident that he was the man we thought he was . . . that he was qualified, according to the Scriptural qualifications.
  + So, what we have done is to raise up a man from within our congregation to be one of our pastor-shepherds, and we are both happy and blessed by his leadership.
  + That, I believe, is the biblical model for raising up church leaders. As Paul wrote to Titus, concerning the selection of church leaders, in Titus 1:5 . . .

***Titus 1:5— For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,***

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* + Paul didn’t instruct Titus to organize a pastoral and elder search committee. He instructed Titus to appoint qualified men from within each new congregation he founded to lead them.
  + Were these men perfect? No. They were all new believers. But the congregations were willing to follow these appointed leaders because they were chosen according to the Scriptural qualifications **and because they knew these men. They were trusted and respected men from among them.**
* The reason I bring up the subject of pastoral searches and the need for churches to raise up their own pastors to be shepherds is to make the point that **here in our passage today the apostle Paul reveals what a true under-shepherd of Christ should look like.**

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* + In defending himself from accusations that he was only an opportunistic and greedy self-serving man, Paul not only defends himself, but he lays out the case for what a true spiritual shepherd should be.
  + While we will examine more of what Paul teaches us about shepherding God’s flock in v. 9-12 next week, we see here in v. 7-8 that **the very first qualification that Paul lists for a called shepherd of God is a love for the sheep**.
  + The first qualification for a true under-shepherd of God is a ***tender care and affection*** for the people he is called to lead and minister to.
  + Without a love for the sheep . . . even though he may be a gifted orator and teacher . . . without a love for the sheep, a man is no more than a hireling who will abandon the flock when the going gets tough or a better “job” comes along.
  + I am grateful to God that He has given the Lord Jesus as the perfect example of a shepherd and men such as Paul, Silas and Timothy as examples of what true under-shepherds look like so that we have models to emulate.