

To the Saints: Paul's Heart for People

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Outline

- Paul knew the Thessalonians
- Paul knew his calling
- Paul knows the Lord

1. Paul knew the Thessalonians

- Background and context

1. Paul knew the Thessalonians

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

1 Thessalonians 2:17–18

2. Paul knew his calling

- A loving brother
- A gentle mother
- An encouraging father
- A proud teacher

A loving brother

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

1 Thessalonians 2:1

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

David Powlison

In approaching the counseling needs of their siblings, these are not fee-for-service parent surrogates from outside the family: nannies, babysitters, orphanage matrons, mere professionals. These brothers do not act parentally at an hourly rate, but make a deeper investment in those whose welfare is their charge.

A gentle mother

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

John Calvin

A mother nursing her children manifests a certain rare and wonderful affection, inasmuch as she spares no labor and trouble, shuns no anxiety, is worn out by no labor, and even with cheerfulness of spirit gives herself to her child.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

A gentle mother

- Notice what Paul did
- Notice how Paul did it
- Notice why Paul did it

Gene Green

His purpose was distinctly pastoral as he urged the church to use this teaching to comfort one another. The passage was clearly not designed to satisfy idle speculative curiosity about the last things; its purpose was to encourage those who were facing the most profound grief that a human could experience.

An encouraging father

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.

1 Thessalonians 2:11–12

¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

1 Thessalonians 4:1–8

An encouraging father

- Notice what Paul did
- Notice how Paul did it
- Notice why Paul did it

An encouraging father

"Hey, can we chat for a few minutes?"

"Sure, what do you want to talk about, Paul?"

"I want to talk to you about pleasing the Lord."

"What do you mean? Are we not doing that already?"

"Yes, yes you are! I see you pleasing the Lord, but I want to encourage you to continue to grow in that area."

"Thanks . . . you have anything specific in mind, Paul?"

An encouraging father

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified."

"What do you mean sanctified?"

"Avoid sexual immorality."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"Learn to control your own body, live within your God-ordained limits."

"Hmm, sounds like a personal matter, Paul."

An encouraging father

"No, make sure that you don't wrong your brother or sister in relationship to these things."

"Well, I'm sure since the Lord is so loving he won't mind if I mess up."

"Listen, the Lord will punish this kind of sin."

"Give it to me again just in a sentence."

"God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

"Paul, this sounds tough and sort of harsh."

An encouraging father

"He who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit."

"Okay, Paul . . . I'll try! Thanks for this talk"

"I love you, I am not telling you this to make you feel bad, but to encourage you to keep loving God and loving others. . . ."

A proud teacher

And you became **imitators** of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:6

For you, brothers, became **imitators** of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.

1 Thessalonians 2:14

3. Paul knows the Lord

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 2:4

Wisdom doesn't speak in boilerplate.

It's never a one-size-fits-all formula. Or, contrary to the Christianese equivalent, it's never 3-steps-to-Victory.

So every psalm, every letter, every gospel, every prophet is different. The same redeemer God speaks and engages diverse people.

And because the people face different problems and are prone to different struggles, his words and actions always come hand-crafted.

Same with your words and actions. That's what it means to counsel the living Christ to another. You might affirm one person, and challenge another, and teach another, and walk beside another, and listen to another, and weep with another . . . and do any or all of the above with the same person, depending. Such flexibility is not eclecticism. Wisdom from God is an appropriate, flexible, and timely wisdom.

David Powlison