

## The Defining Character of Ministry

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 28:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:2–12; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 13:17; Revelation 2:23

Code: A275

When you think of an evangelical pastor, what images come to mind? Salesman? Stand-up comic? Corporate executive? Sadly, too many pastors today fit those professions better than the biblical prototype. But the apostle Paul paints a different picture in 1 Thessalonians, and it's all about character. That's John MacArthur's message to the men training for pastoral ministry at [The Master's Seminary](#).

Ministry in Paul's day was not easy. Leon Morris observes: "There has probably never been such a variety of religious cults and philosophic systems as in Paul's day. East and West had united and intermingled to produce an amalgam of real piety, high moral principles, crude superstition, and gross license." Sounds like today, doesn't it? "The sincere and the spurious, the righteous and the rogue, swindlers and saints, jostled and clamored for the attention of the credulous and the skeptical."

It's against this background that we get a glimpse into the character of Paul's leadership. In 1 Thessalonians 2, he calls them to remember what they know about him—the nature of his ministry and his leadership. He builds on the idea that his effectiveness was based upon his perception of God—which in turn defined the character of his ministry.

First of all, *he was confident in God's power*, giving him **tenacity**. "After we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition" (1 Thessalonians 2:2). That's tenacity. His relentlessness is predicated upon his confidence in God's power.

In spite of the abuse and public degradation in Philippi before arriving in Thessalonica, Paul remarks that "we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition" (1 Thessalonians 2:2). That is the heart and soul of ministry! The preacher's objective is never to minimize the conflict over the gospel, because inevitably the gospel is an offense. The mark of a great leader is not how well he avoids conflict, but how courageously he accepts it.

Second, *he was committed to God's truth*. "Our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit" (1 Thessalonians 2:3). His ministry was characterized by **integrity**. "Impurity" frequently has sexual overtones. Many of the false teachers in the ancient world were, as they are today, marked by a secret life of gross sexual sin. Paul is not a phony or a deceiver. "Deceit" is the word for fishhook. Paul is not trying to catch people for his own benefit, as the false teachers did. His integrity is related to the truth—something he could not amend or abandon.

Third, *he was commissioned by God's will*. "Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak" (1 Thessalonians 2:4a). In other words, he understood his **authority** came from God, who entrusted him with the stewardship of the gospel. He was tested and approved

by God (present tense, indicating a lasting appeal). Paul told Timothy to command, to teach, and to rebuke with all authority; he told Titus to let no one evade that. The preacher is marked by his authority when preaching the gospel.

Fourth, *he was compelled by God's omniscience*. God's omniscience generated **accountability**. "We speak not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness" (1 Thessalonians 2:4b-5). Under the direct oversight of God (2 Timothy 4:1), the minister who serves the Lord will one day give an account to the Lord (Hebrews 13:17). And what happens in that future time of rewards is determined by the overwhelming sense of accountability maintained day by day (1 Chronicles 28:9; Revelation 2:23).

You can be surrounded by a lot of people to whom you're accountable. But if you lose the battle of accountability to God in your heart, you will never win it on the outside. The real battle is fought in the conscience and in the heart.

Fifth, *he was consumed with God's glory* (1 Thessalonians 2:6), resulting in **humility**. Not seeking glory from men is very difficult. As an apostle of Christ and as one who had been to heaven, Paul could have demanded a lot of accolades. But, being consumed with God's glory, he had no interest in seeking glory from men.

Sixth, *he was compassionate with God's people* (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12). One of the most enriching insights into the heart of ministry is the apostle's **sympathy**. The most tender and relentless expression of love is that of a mother to her nursing child—no possible reciprocation, no greater intimacy, no greater dependence. If you give this to your congregation, they will endure a lot. Take this out, and they're liable to fight you tooth and nail. In most cases when you get into a church, you'll have to nurse them. You must be patient and tender, knowing it's a long, sometimes painful process.

As a pastor, you need to yearn that Christ would be fully formed in your people. There needs to be a patience, tenderness, and deep affection. It's a never-ending, night and day deal (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

Paul ends with a father analogy (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The mother's side is love, care, tenderness, and compassion; the father's side is courage, moral character, example, exhortation, and instruction. Mothers have the intimate influence; father set the course for direction, spiritual strength, and motivation. That's a magnificent balance.

When tenacity, integrity, authority, accountability, humility, and sympathy are the characteristics of your ministry, the fruit of verses 13-14 is going to be there. You will become what a church should be—a model church that others can look to. As you are faithful to serve in the ways that Paul models here, you will put yourself in a position to guide a people who respond to the Word of God and lead a church that will become what churches should be.

Reprinted from "The Master's Mantle," Winter/Spring 2006; copyright 2006, [The Master's Seminary](#).

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