

6 Traits of the Effective Church Leader, part 1

(1 Thessaloninas 2:1-12)

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Introduction

If you head to Amazon and simply type in “leadership book,” you will be overwhelmed with over 50,000 choices..

You see, books on leadership are popular in the world.

Businessmen write leadership books..

Military officers write leadership books.

Doctors, lawyers, pastors, and all sorts of other professionals write books on leadership..

Athletes, coaches write books on leadership..

Then you have psychologists and professors and sociologists all writing books on leadership..

As a result, the book store is bursting at the seams with books of leadership..

Amazon has 50,000 choices but that is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to leadership instruction..

Everybody wants to give the secrets to being a good leader..

Whether you are a wife or blue collar worker or a father or whatever walk of life you are, there is a book on leadership just for you..

Needless to say, the choices are overwhelming in terms of learning how to lead...

But in terms of leadership in the church, what does an effective leader look like?

For those who lead the church, the pastor, the elder, the deacon, the teacher, what makes an effective leader?

Well, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 will give us some help in defining the effective church leader..

Do effective church leaders have a great voice and gift of preaching?

Do effective church leaders have a charismatic personality?

Are effective church leaders good businessmen?

Are effective church leaders those with the best vision and communication skills?

Well, we are going to find out from one who may be considered the greatest church leader in history besides Jesus..

And that is the apostle Paul?

Now, let's set the stage for what we are going to read in verses 1-12 of 1 Thessalonians 2..

If you remember from the past two weeks, 1 Thessalonians is a letter that Paul wrote the church located in Thessalonica in roughly 51 BC.

Thessalonica was a large city of 300,000 people, but God had established a church there through the evangelistic ministry of Paul..

This map shows us some of Paul's travels in the 1st century and we have learned that Paul eventually made his way to Thessalonica..

Where he preached Jesus in the synagogue there and saw some Jews come to Christ.

Those believers formed a church there in Thessalonica..

Now Paul stayed there with them for a short time teaching them how to behave as Christians..

But we also know that Paul didn't stay very long as the remaining Jews in the synagogue ran him out of town..

Now that quicker than expected departure alarmed Paul.

He had hoped to spend more time there with this small group of new believers, but it simply didn't work out..

However, Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to check on them after tensions calmed down..

And though Paul probably expected bad news from Timothy, he received great news.

The Thessalonian church was thriving...

So Paul sat down to write them a letter of encouragement..

And this letter simply because what is known as the book of 1 Thessalonians...

Now, the opening chapter of this letter was a series of compliments from Paul to this church..

He commended their work ethic.

He commended their imitation of Christ.

He commanded the example they were setting in their area.

And he commended the fact that they were living in expectation of Christ's return...

And we looked at those opening remarks of this letter over the past two weeks in hopes of learning how we at Pine Grove can be a more effective church for the Lord in our area.

Now in chapter 2, Paul switches from effective churches to effective church leaders..

And the shift in chapter is probably a result of people who had been attacking the character of Paul..

Though the unbelieving Jews weren't able to keep folks from believing Paul's preaching and being saved, they hoped to diminish further growth in the church by attacking Paul's character..

And I think we all understand this tactic of evil people..

If you can't argue the message, you simply attack the messenger..

And Paul had felt those attacks even though he wasn't in Thessalonica...

Most likely, the church had told Timothy of the attacks on Paul..

And so chapter 2 really becomes a defense by Paul of his character and leadership..

And though it may sound defensive, it isn't defensive to speak the truth...

Paul wanted to defend his character simply because the gospel was at stake...

If he rolled over and failed to respond to the critics, it would be an admission of guilt even though he was not at fault..

So he launches into a defense of his ministry, but in the process of doing that, he gives us a picture of what Godly leaders look like and do...

And so these first 12 verses of chapter 2 become a test of sorts for the Christian leader...

These verses become a standard for me as a pastor to live up to but they also become a standard for you if you are engaged in ministry..

And furthermore, these verses offer a good measure of the ministry of others in your life..

In other words, you can use these verses to judge the worthiness of someone in ministry...

So, let's dig into this passage by reading it in its entirety and then we will go back and grab some characteristics of the effective church leader...

Verse 1...

For you yourselves know, brothers,[a] that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 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. 3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 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. 5 For we never came with words of flattery, [b] as you know, nor with a pretext for greed— God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle[c] among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 8 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.

9 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. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. 11 For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 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.

The first characteristic of effective leadership in the church is found in verses 1 and 2...

I. Effective Church Leaders are Committed (1-2)

In verses 1 and 2, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that it wasn't easy for him to come to them..

As we look back at our map, Paul came to Thessalonica after being jailed in Philippi..

In fact, I want us to read about what happened to them in Phillipi so that we really understand what Paul is saying in verse 1 and verse 2 here..

So look with me at Acts 16:11...

11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the[d] district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. 16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divina-

tion and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

From there, you probably know the story..

An earthquake hits the prison that night and the doors fly open but Paul and Silas don't escape..

Instead, they share the gospel with the Philippian jailer and are eventually released the next morning..

You can turn back to 1 Thessalonians 2 now..

Now with that background in our mind, verse 2 comes to life..

Paul had been beaten and shameful treated in Philippi, but that didn't stop him from heading to the next town...

Now why is this important?

Simply put, a man who continues to preach the gospel in the next town after just suffering for preaching it in the last town demonstrates incredible commitment to his task.

Paul got beaten in Philippi but instead of going home, he went on to the next town.

This is a man who understands the importance of the gospel.

This is a man who feels compelled to do his job despite the opposition.

This is a man willing to risk his life to get the word of life into the ears of others.

This is the effective church leader.

Look, we have enough lukewarm believers in the church, but we certainly don't need lukewarm preachers who are ready to compromise at the first sign of trouble.

It takes courage to stand on the truth when everyone stands against you and even physically attacks you.

But Christ is worth it.

He also the physical opposition to his ministry.

Paul's commitment to the gospel made him bold even when he had every reason to be shy and timid.

The church doesn't need men in leadership who are half-hearted.

The church needs men in leadership who are whole heartedly committed to the task that God has given them to do..

So effective church leaders are committed and courageous...

The second quality of an effective church leader is found is in verses 3 and 4..

II. Effective Church Leaders are Centered (3-4)

Look at verse 3 and 4 again...

3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 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.

As Paul and his team made their way around the Mediterranean world spreading the gospel, it is clear that they weren't in it for themselves...

In verse 3, Paul makes it clear that he wasn't preaching the gospel in an attempt to spread error into the world..

Obviously, Paul's critics had accused him of misinterpreting and misusing the OT...

And Paul is quick to say that his ministry wasn't based on error..

In fact, Paul sees himself as a guardian of the truth..

His ministry spread the truth but it also protected the truth..

And clearly, all effective church leaders handle the truth with care..

I see articles all the time and I hear people talk all the time about what to look for in a church..

And 9 times out of 10, I hear people looking for churches based upon things that shouldn't be the litmus test of a church and a pastor..

I hear people looking for churches based upon the age of the pastor..

I hear people looking for churches based upon the appearance of the building and grounds...

I hear people looking for churches based upon the music and worship..

I hear people looking for churches based upon the children's ministry or the youth ministry...

Look all those things are fine and dandy, but the number one priority in choosing a church is how well does the church preach and guard the truth.

That is it.

Because if they do that well, they would do everything else well.

But if they don't guard the truth, they won't guard anything else.

And Paul makes it clear that his ministry was not about spreading error, but spreading and guarding the truth.

He also notes that his ministry was not based on impurity.

That is a nice way of saying that he wasn't in ministry to satisfy any sinful desires in his life.

In other words, he wasn't in ministry in order to take advantage of women.

Most likely, Paul's critics were accusing him of sexual immorality, and the reason for that is because some many religious leaders of Paul's day were guilty of sexual sins..

In fact, most religions of Paul's day engaged in all sorts of sexual sin..

We won't get into all those details, but Thessalonica was sin city, and you can hear people grumbling about Paul saying that he only came there to establish a church to satisfy his lusts...

But Paul says here that he wasn't in ministry due to impure motives..

Nor was Paul in ministry in an effort to decide people..

Look some church leaders are in it to gain a following through deception.

They are like magicians who fool you in order to gain popularity..

Paul wasn't in ministry to deceive...

So why was Paul in ministry?

Look again at the end of verse 4...

so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Paul is in ministry because he is centered in the Lord.

Paul isn't doing ministry to please himself or to please people, he is doing ministry to please the Lord.

And look, this is so important for the effective church leader..

You can't do ministry in an effort to satisfy yourself...

You can't do ministry in an effort to satisfy others.

You must do ministry in an effort to satisfy the Lord.

I can tell you right now from personal experience...

If I was in ministry in an effort to be happy every day, I would have been long gone...

If I was in ministry in an effort to keep all of yall happy with me, I would have been long gone..

This is why my motivation fro ministry can't be me or even the people around me, it must the God above me.

I have to minister based on a desire to please God..

Effective church leaders must be centered upon the Lord...

If you do ministry to please yourself, you will get burnt out...

If you do ministry to please others, you will get cussed out...

But if you do ministry to please the Lord, you will never get worn out...

Paul and his companions were in ministry to spread error or to engage in immorality..

They weren't in ministry to deceive and gain a following..

They were in ministry to please the Lord, and any effective church leader will be in it for the same reason..

A third characteristic of the effective church leader is found in verses 5 and 6..

III. Effective Church Leaders are Content (5-6)

Listen carefully to me...

Many people have entered ministry to get rich or to get famous.

Because one usually brings the other..

Yet makes it clear in verses 5 and 6 that he didn't come to the Thessalonians looking for a following or looking to get rich..

5 For we never came with words of flattery,[b] as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Two key words there, - GREED and GLORY.

There are greedy people who enter ministry to satisfy their lust for wealth..

Turn on your TV and you will find no shortage of preachers asking for your check of \$1000 dollars..

Turn on your TV and you will find no shortage of men asking for your “seed money.”

These men and women are driven by greed.

They learn just enough of the Bible to twist Scripture into making you feel guilty enough to send some money to their ministry..

They twist the Bible just enough to make people feel that the test of their true faith is found in their bank account...

These people are charlatans and con men and frauds hiding behind Christian ministry..

And they have been around since the very beginning using God as a way to get money..

Judas was that kind of supposed church leader..

But Paul says in verse 5 that he isn't that kind of man...

He wasn't driven by greed, but he also wasn't driven by glory..

Verse 6..

6 Nor did we seek glory from people,

Effective church leaders cannot be driven by the praise of man..

Look, if you do ministry, you want to feel appreciated, but you can't do ministry with an expectation of appreciation..

Because that rarely comes...

God keeps his servants humble by shielding them from man's applause..

Paul never had a statue built in his honor during his lifetime.

They never had a national holiday in Israel because of Paul's mission efforts..

And if you do ministry, you will it a thankless endeavor..

If you do it well, no one says a word, but worse, if you make a mistake, everyone will say a word..

Effective church leaders cannot be driven by greed or glory...

Let me say this carefully but confidently..

If you find yourself in a church or in a ministry where the preacher takes center stage, be very careful..

It is probably not a place where you want to stay long.

Effective church leaders are not seeking more money or praise, they are simply content with what they have and who they are..

That leaves us 3 more characteristics to look at next week...

Conclusion

Let me end with a couple thoughts for us tonight..

#1 - Leadership is based on confidence in the Lord.

Church leadership comes with 2 guarantees.

One is that you will be discouraged.

Two is that you will be criticized.

So where does the courage and commitment come from to do ministry?

Look back at verse 2.,,

WE had boldness in our God..

Paul was nothing special and neither were Timothy or Silas or any of the early church leaders..

But they served and trusted a special God.

I am one of the least confident people that you will meet.

You may not think that by how I preach, but it is very true..

I even put my driver's test off for over a year because I had a fear of failing..

This is why have to study so much in preparation for a sermon..

Because once I understand a passage and know its meaning, I have confidence in the Lord to help me declare it with boldness..

This is why any effective church leader must know God and His word before he attempts to do ministry..

If you are confident in yourself and your cleverness and your personality, you will fail in ministry.

But if you are confident in the Lord, you will succeed.

The second thing I want to leave us with tonight is this..

#2 - Leadership is based on a clean conscience before the Lord and others.

I want you to take note of verse 1...

For you yourselves know..

Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that the attacks on him must be false since they know what kind of man Paul was...

And then I want you to take note of the end of verse 5..

God is witness.

In other words, people can testify about the character of Paul, but even more, God can testify about the character of Paul.

Now, this isn't arrogance.

Paul isn't claiming sinlessness in his ministry, but he is reminding the church that the pattern of his life is obedience to these godly characteristics that he is listing..

The Thessalonians had first hand experience that Paul wasn't greedy or lustful or in it for his own glory.

But even if the Thessalonians didn't that, God knew that about Paul..

This is why a clean conscience is a necessity requirement in church leadership but also in the Christian life.

Look, the enemy is going to come after you whether you lead or serve or support the church.

And the greatest answer to criticism is to simply let your life speak for itself.

Yes, you may have defend yourself with words at times.

But by and large, your greatest friend in leadership or simply as a believer is a clean conscience guided by the Bible.

Look, I can't be everywhere and answer every critic, but I can live a life that silences those who attack me.

If you are going to lead the church, let the people you serve defend you and ultimately, let the Lord defend you..

Let us pray.

IV. Effective Church Leaders are Compassionate (7-8)

V. Effective Church Leaders are Conscientious
(9-10)

VI. Effective Church Leaders are Concerned
(11-12)