

PLEASING TO GOD

BIBLE BASIS: I Thessalonians 2:112

BIBLE TRUTH: Jesus wants us to focus our attention on Him—make Him the center of our lives.

MEMORY VERSE: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts (I Thessalonians 2:4).

LESSON AIM: That your students will examine their personal motives for commitment to God and the faith community.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources—charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, Bibles (several different versions)

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

BIBLE APPLICATION

Our commitment to God should be motivated by our desire to please Him.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

That your students will cease activities that are not pleasing to God.

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To revisit an experience that motivated students' commitment to God.

BIBLE LEARNING

To identify actions mentioned by Paul, and categorize them as either pleasing or displeasing to God.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

I THESSALONIANS 2:112

1. For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

2. But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to

speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

3. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

4. But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

5. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness:

6. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

7. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

8. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

9. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

10. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

11. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

12. That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul's second missionary trip encompassed 12 cities, including Philippi and Thessalonica. After being imprisoned in Philippi for preaching the Gospel, Paul traveled to Thessalonica (Acts 17:19). Upon arrival, he located the Jewish synagogue and boldly preached there for three Sabbath days. Paul focused his preaching on the purpose of the death and resurrection of Jesus, explaining that Jesus was the "Christ," the "anointed one" promised by God to save the Jews (Acts 17:3). His compelling message was well received by some Jews as well as devout Greeks and influential women.

Ultimately, however, his visit was cut short by the antics of enraged, jealous Jews who sparked an uprising that forced Paul to leave Thessalonica. However, believing he needed additional time to further expound the Gospel to the Thessalonians, Paul later made several attempts to revisit them, but "Satan hindered (him)" (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). So Paul's letter to the Thessalonians was delivered by Timothy.

Paul wrote this early letter to Thessalonian believers to: 1) commend their steadfast faith, while simultaneously addressing their questions regarding the afterlife and other issues; 2) exhort them to remain faithful in the face of continuing persecution; and 3) spark individual self-reflection regarding motives for continued commitment to Christ and the faith community.

Today's lesson discusses our personal motives for commitment to God and the faith community. A holy (set apart from sin) God commands us to live holy lives. Therefore, the single, overall goal that should shape our life should grow out of an earnest commitment to please God.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will become clear about their assignment to serve God and spread the truth of His Word.

INTRODUCTION

Committed to Serve

In his letter, Paul applauds the Thessalonians for their commitment to serve and spread the Gospel, especially in the face of opposition. Given Paul's history of giving and receiving persecution, the letter loudly resounds as an

exhortation to remain steadfast and committed to God. If he, by God's grace, could endure persecution, so could the new believers in Thessalonians who were facing similar strife and deadly threats.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will understand Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.

I. GOD GAVE APOSTLE PAUL AND HIS COWORKERS THE COURAGE TO MINISTER (I Thessalonians 2:14)

On the basis of this commission, Paul and his fellow workers preached wherever they went. They did nothing superficial just to please men. Ultimately, it was God's approval that mattered to them. This kind of goal excluded ulterior or hidden motives from the eyes of God "which trieth our hearts" (I Thessalonians 2:4). God's scrutiny, His knowledge of every thought, was Paul's ultimate court of appeal in summoning evidence for his absolute sincerity.

Courage to Declare the Good News (verses 14)

1. For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

The verse begins with a participle, "for" (Greek, *gar*), that connects the narration beginning in 2:1 with the introduction in the preceding verses and links the introduction's emphasis on imitation (1:210) with Paul's relaying of the missionaries' activities. Paul was combating critics (cf. Acts 17:56 and 17:13), and he did so by calling on the Thessalonians as his "defense witnesses." The real emphasis here is on the nature of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica. Paul emphasized the fact that the readers themselves must testify to his character. All the facts required for Paul's vindication were of

common knowledge. His visit to the Thessalonians "was not in vain." That is, it produced good results. The word "vain" here (Greek, *kenos*, *kenOS*), can refer either to the result of the ministry, or the character of the ministry. Because it was evident to everyone that Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was a success, it is better to see his word choice as a reference to the outcomes of the apostle's ministry. Paul's coming was not empty or hollow, as if he were a mere salesman or marketer.

2. But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

Paul's visit to Thessalonica, like the one to Philippi, was not without difficulties. This Gospel was not brought to Thessalonica without cost or without opposition. If Paul was in it for himself, he was not very smart about serving his self-interest. Despite what some of Paul's accusers said, he did not only preach the Gospel when it was easy or convenient. Paul said that his preaching took place "with much contention" (verse 2, KJV), or better translated, "in the face of considerable opposition" as the Greek phrase *en polus agon* (*en polOOS agONE*) suggests. The Greek word for "contention" (*agon*) is a metaphor drawn from ancient athletic games and also refers to the arena for these contests. Contention, therefore, is meant to describe a strong opposition and bring to mind an athlete's intense struggle to gain the first place in a race or other contest. It had three possible meanings in this context: (1) It could refer to the effort exerted in preaching the Gospel; (2) it could imply that the missionaries encountered intense conflict with those who opposed their activities; or (3) it

could refer to the anxiety Paul, Silas, and others felt as a result of the troubles at Philippi. At any rate, Paul is stressing that he carried on his ministry in Thessalonica in spite of considerable opposition.

3. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.

In the first century world Paul lived in, there were many competing religions. Motivated by greed and gain, most of these preachers were itinerant missionaries and opportunists, who took everything they could from their listeners, and then moved on to find someone else to support them. Paul further denied any attempt to use deceit so as to trick his listeners. He was neither guilty of self-deceit nor of "guile" (Greek, *dolos*, DOL os), that is, deceiving others, though he was accused of doing so on more occasions than this (cf. II Corinthians 4:2; 12:16).

4. But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

As preachers of the Gospel of Christ, Paul contended that openness and honesty, their true state, would show that an all-knowing God had found them worthy to declare His Gospel. The words "allowed" and "trieth" in this verse (KJV) come from the Greek word *dokimazo* (*dokimADzo*), which means to be approved or tested; associated with having determined that someone is fit for public service. To be "allowed of (approved by) God" entails a process of testing, success in completing the tests, and, consequently, receiving

God's endorsement. Paul knew his Gospel would not always please all his hearers, but he knew that it was pleasing to God. In verse 4,

Paul was probably alluding to his encounter with the Saviour on the Damascus road (see also Acts 9:316). That encounter involved both his conversion and commission. God subjected Paul to necessary rigors to demonstrate his capability for his assigned task. Having thus prepared him, God committed to Paul the Gospel message for proclamation among Gentiles such as the Thessalonians.

QUESTION 1

What kind of messengers did Apostle Paul declare him and his coworkers to be (I Thessalonians 2:4)?

(Answer) They were messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Motives for Commitment

Paul's discussion of his team's activity was not a pat on the back, but rather an urging to examine motives for commitment. He specifically addressed:

- Deceit.
- Uncleanness.
- Guile and Flattery.
- Covetousness.
- Glory.

II. BECAUSE GOD IS OUR WITNESS ... (I Thessalonians 2:59)

Like Paul and his coworkers in Christ, we must continually examine our motives to serve while avoiding actions that clearly displease God. We must ask ourselves: Are we serving for pure or impure reasons? Are we choosing or pursuing

more prominent positions, simply because they are more visible or lucrative? Are we opting for service opportunities that others want, just to engender strife or jealousy? These are honest questions worth considering each time an opportunity to serve comes our way. If we honestly assess our motives and realize they are more human pleasing than God honoring, then we need to remember Paul and his team's example and conduct ourselves accordingly. By doing so, like them, we will not 1) deal deceitfully; 2) take sexual (consensual or nonconsensual) advantage over others; 3) use subtlety or flattery to get our way; and 4) demand excessive financial or other gifts as a "blessing" for our service.

God Is My Witness (verses 59)

5. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness.

Paul continued to defend the missionary work he and his team were doing. First, at no time did they use flattering words in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Greek word for "flattery" (*kolakeia*, *kolaklah*) described a sinister practice of using kindsounding words to achieve one's own selfish ends. Paul never engaged in such practices and was confident that his coworkers were equally innocent. Second, Paul denied putting on the kind of mask or "cloak" that greed wears. He wanted to make sure no one could accurately accuse him and his ministry team of *pleonexia* (*plehonexEEah*), meaning self-seeking grandiosity, a greedy quest for anything that brings self-satisfaction (see also Colossians 3:111). Such complete disinterest in the rights and feelings of others was an attitude foreign to Paul and his helpers. He did not allow covetousness under any pretext. But only God could verify inner

freedom from greed. So Paul called on God as his witness.

6. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

In defense of his ministry the apostle pointed out that he and his helpers had not "sought glory" (K[V] or "praise from men" (NIV). In the New Testament the word "glory" (Greek. *doxa*, *DOKsah*), usually translated as "good opinion" or "honor." During the midpoint of the first century, Paul's time, there were many wandering philosophers, prophets of other religions, magicians, false prophets, and others seeking financial gain and the prestige of a good reputation as well. That was not the case with Paul. God's approval, as we already saw in verse 4, not popularity or public esteem, was what motivated Paul and his assistants. Moreover, Paul and his coworkers refused to take advantage of their positions as apostles. Paul wanted to give something to the Thessalonians and others he and his team ministered to, not take something from them. Although they had a right to their maintenance, while they devoted themselves wholly to the work of the Gospel for the sake of people's souls, Paul made it clear that he and his team would not do so.

7. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

Paul's tone shifts, even as he continues to defend his team's missionary activities. The ministry team used a "gentle" approach. They were not authoritarian (verse 7). They put aside what others might see as their rights of being respected and playing a dominating part; instead, the team demonstrated utmost tenderness. Although the Greek word *trophos* (*trofos*) meant "a nurse," it often referred to

the mother herself, as it did here. The word "her" (Greek, heautou, hehow TOO), although general in English, here denotes a mother's intimate bonds of affection and concern for her own children. The word "cherisheth" (Greek, thalpo, THALpo) means "to have warm feelings for," "to foster, to nourish." In Deuteronomy 22:6, a Hebrew word with a similar meaning (qen, kane), "nest," was used to refer to a bird warming her eggs. Therefore, Paul was like a nursing mother, making a special effort to protect and to provide for every need, even to the extent of great sacrifice. Though some among the Thessalonians had accused Paul of ministering out of self-interest, he simply asked the Christians in Thessalonica to remember the gentle character of his ministry among them.

8. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

In this verse, Paul continued to elaborate on his theme of godly concern and self-sacrificing love. Paul and his coworkers were prepared to share their lives at the deepest level—willing to "impart" (Greek, metadido mi, metadIDomee), or "disclose," "grant," "reveal knowledge of their own souls. The phrase "So being desirously desirous of you" (KJV), or "We loved you so much" (NLT), (Greek, himeiromai, himIromahee), expresses strong affection and attachment, a kindhearted feeling for someone. Such was the intensity of the missionaries' attachment to the Thessalonians and others they were ministering to that Paul and his collaborators "were willing" or "were delighted" (Greek, eudokeo, yoodokEHo) to share themselves fully with them. Paul's motive was love: "because ye were dear unto us."

9. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

Paul continued his affectionate appeal to memory by recalling to the Thessalonians' minds his tireless labor among them. He recalled the long hours of extreme toil and hardship by which the missionaries supported themselves while preaching. "Labour" (Greek, kopos, KOPos), also used in 1:3, emphasized the fatigue or exhaustion they incurred in the efforts they made, while "travail" (Greek, mochthos, MOKHthos), referred to the trouble and pain of arduous work; the leading notion was that of struggling to overcome difficulties. The missionary team worked at night as well as during the day, while proclaiming the Gospel (2:9b). By this "around-the-clock" diligence, Paul lifted the burden of support from his converts. His central purpose was to give them the Gospel of God. From this, nothing should detract; and making the Gospel "free of charge" (I Corinthians 9:18, NIV) eliminated anyone's charges of selfish motives.

Although Paul recognized his right to be supported by those he ministered to, he voluntarily gave up that right and took a higher standard upon himself. He would not insist on "rights," if this in any way limited or hindered the preaching of the Gospel. It was a principle that he enunciated in I Corinthians 6:12; 9:12; 10:23. This was probably due in part to his consideration for the poverty of his converts, although one could infer from Acts 17 that some of Paul's converts could afford to give. The apostle was determined to remove all grounds for attack on his person and the Gospel he proclaimed. We must constantly bear in mind that for a ministry to be honored by God

and respected by others, it must be rooted in deep ethical principle and sacrificial love.

QUESTION 2

How long did Paul and his coworkers labor on jobs outside of the church so that they would not be a burden to those they preached to (I Thessalonians 2:9)?

(Answer) They worked night and day.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

We Must Please Him

After years spent pleasing the Jews by persecuting Christians, Paul was unabashedly a God pleaser. He encouraged others to be the same. He specifically advised the Galatians, for example, not to let anybody or anything (i.e., angels) sway them from the true Gospel (Galatians 1:68). In Paul's opinion, a message or even a service commitment must originate with God to be considered of value.

Moreover, in his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addressed the issue of pleasing God to acknowledge that many Christians grapple with feelings of inadequacy, believing their efforts are in vain and displeasing to God. Paul made it clear that pleasing God is inversely related to pleasing humankind (I Thessalonians 2:4). The more you please God, the less you'll strive to please others, and vice versa.

Above all else, faith is a key element to pleasing God. Indeed, as Paul stated elsewhere, "Whatever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23), and "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). There is no way around it: God requires faith first, service second. Faith denotes a belief in God as the only true God. It also denotes trusting God in all we do. We know

we are serving in faith, and thus pleasing God, when we display faith.

III. WHY WE SHOULD BE DETERMINED

TO PLEASE GOD

(I Thessalonians 2:1012)

If faith alone pleases God, then God is already pleased that we have made the commitment to receive Christ as Savior. Our subsequent desire to serve Him based on that commitment will require pure motives as we serve in our homes, churches, places of employment, and communities. Those pure motives backed by faith based service will always please God, even if people may not be pleased.

Determined to Please God (verses 1012)

10. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

Paul appealed to the Thessalonians as witnesses of "how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed" (verse 10, NIV). In addition, the apostle called upon God and His all-seeing knowledge to attest to the ministry team's behavior. "Holily" (Greek, hosios, hoseeOCE) signified religious piety and one's duty toward God; "justly" (Greek, dikaios, dikAHyoce), means literally, "righteously," or "moral conduct." Paul and his assistants acted "unblameably" (Greek, amemptos, AMemptos), meaning they were "blameless," "untainted by fault in their dealings." Paul's own behavior and message to the Thessalonians demonstrated the integrity of his character before God and others.

It is impressive that Paul could freely appeal to his own life as an example. The apostle did not

have to say, "Please do not look at my life. Look to Jesus." Paul wanted people to look to Jesus, but he could also tell them to look at his own life, because the power of Jesus was real in his life. Paul was comfortable in the idea of other Christians following his example and restated this viewpoint in other correspondence with believers (I Thessalonians 1:6; Philippians 3:17; I Corinthians 11:1).

11. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

Paul's words united the tenderness of a mother (2:78; Isaiah 66:13) with the strength of a father (I Corinthians 4:14^16). Paul's point was clear: Christians need fatherly instruction, advice, and teaching as well as motherly care. The phrase in I Thessalonians 2:11, "every one of you" (Greek, *heis hekastos humon, hice hekAHStos hooMONE*), or literally, "each one of you" was emphatic and suggested one-on-one discipling. This is also the idea in Acts 20:20, where Paul described his ministry as involving teaching "publicly" and also going "house to house."

12. That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

God's call into His kingdom and glory is an incentive to a high quality of life. Although, in one sense God's kingdom is already present (Matthew 12:28; 13:5152; Romans 14:17; I Corinthians 4:20; Colossians 1:13), Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that the ultimate realization of God's kingdom, along with its future glory, were theirs to heed (cf. Acts 17:7). As he did frequently in his letters to the Thessalonians, the apostle pointed out to them the enjoyment ahead as motivation for godly living now. "Glory" is an unhindered manifestation of God's presence in which

believers will share (Romans 5:2; 8:18). If believers' present aim is to live lives worthy of God, their ultimate goal is to participate in God's kingdom and glory.

QUESTION 3

According to Apostle Paul, how should believers walk in ministry and everyday living (I Thessalonians 2:12)?

(Answer) We should walk worthy of God, who has called us into His kingdom and glory.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will cease activities that are not pleasing to God.

For Christians, having right motives is nearly impossible without a commitment to first please God. When we unflinchingly look at the root of why we serve at church, for example, we may realize that many activities are conducted simply to gain favor with people or retain a spotlight of local glory. God is not pleased with such motives. Can you pinpoint a time when your motives negatively impacted you at work, church, or home? How did you recover from the experience? What steps did God lead you through to help you purify your motives and restore fellowship with family, friends, or coworkers?

PRAYER

Father, in the name of Jesus, we come to You asking that You would help us to be pleasing to You in all that we do and say. We desire truth in the inward parts. We desire to live out Your will every single day. Guide our choices, thoughts, actions, and lead us down the path that pleases You most. Thank You for Your direction. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

HOW TO SAY IT:

Travail. tre'val, 'traval.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read I Thessalonians 3 and observe how we are
"Sustained through Encouragement."

COMMENTS / NOTES:

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

Seeking God's Approval

(Galatians 1:110)

TUESDAY

Examining the Scriptures (Acts 17:1014)

WEDNESDAY

Faith That Pleases God

(Hebrews 11:47)

THURSDAY

Doing What Pleases God (I John 3:1824)

FRIDAY

Imitators of the Faithful (I Thessalonians
2:1316)

SATURDAY

Paul's Glory and Joy (I Thessalonians 2:1720)

SUNDAY

A Life Worthy of God (I Thessalonians 2:112)