

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Fail-Proof Spiritual Leadership

The highlight of our time together as we worship the Lord is communing with Him through His Word. I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2...1 Thessalonians chapter 2. And in our ongoing study of this epistle, as God would have it in His wonderful providence, we come this morning to chapter 2 verses 1 through 6. This is not only God's message to our church at this time, but is definitely God's message for those who are attending our Shepherds' Seminar. It never ceases to amaze me how God orchestrates even apart from our planning to bring a word to us that is for the very moment and that is the case this morning.

If I were to title these six verses I would title them, "Fail-proof spiritual leadership....Fail-proof spiritual leadership." Everybody knows there is a great premium on leadership and everybody realizes that there are fewer leaders than are needed, fewer faithful leaders than are expected. We also know that leadership is very difficult. Even in the world when the team doesn't win they fire the coach. And when the employees don't produce they fire the president. Everybody recognizes the tremendous need for capable, enthusiastic, inspiring influence which is the primary role of leadership. And the leadership crisis in our nation is a small matter when compared to the leadership crisis in the church. The failures of leadership in the church seem to be common and almost epidemic. And I'm afraid more such failures fill the future.

The question that comes to mind then is how can spiritual leaders be effective? How can spiritual leaders be successful spiritually? How can they have a genuine and lasting impact on their charge? Is there a path to genuine spiritual effectiveness for the leader that God has identified in His church?

As the leaders go, so go the people. The New Testament tells us to follow those who are over us in the faith and pattern our lives after them. Is that a safe thing to do? How can we guarantee the effectiveness of spiritual leadership?

Well before answering that question it might be somewhat reasonable to rehearse for just a moment or two the things that make spiritual leadership so very challenging. Those who are called to preach, those who are called to pastor, those who are called to be elders in the church have an immense responsibility. Their responsibility is to preach the gospel for the conversion of the unbelieving and the ungodly sinners. Their responsibility is to gather those converts in to solemn assemblies and order churches for the purpose of worshipping God. Their responsibility is to teach the congregation by expounding clearly and powerfully and applying directly the Word of God to their lives. Their responsibility is to administer the ordinances in such a way as to lead the people to renew their covenant of obedience and to confess their sin and to purify themselves from all filthiness of the flesh. Their responsibility is to oversee the church, to govern its life including the rebuke of the disobedient and the strengthening of the faint. Their responsibility is to train and to appoint teachers and workers

for each believer so that they reach all of those who are in their care and are able to in a diverse way offer biblical counsel and example for resolving their doubts, their weaknesses, their fears, their difficulties, their sins and their anxieties.

The responsibility of the spiritual leader is also to be the physician who runs the hospital which cares for all their infections, whether vice or heresy and leads them to holy cures or expels them. And the spiritual leader is responsible to be the tender shepherd who cares to see that all their needs are supplied and all their wounds are healed and all their distresses are resolved. The spiritual leader is to champion the truth, defending it and its flock. And for all of that he must answer to Christ. And in all of it he is to be a model of spiritual virtue and is to live what he wants the people to become.

Who is qualified? Who can discharge such an immense responsibility effectively? And yet here we are...called, ordained, set apart, put into the ministry and now we are held against this standard that God has established. We have such an immense range of responsibility, such a high degree of responsibility before God, with all of our weaknesses in the flesh, it is questionable whether any of us could ever succeed. And so many of us live with the fear of failure. That's not uncommon.

All of that should welcome us to this text. For in these marvelous six verses Paul shares with us the principles for an effective ministry. He was like us. He had the call of God. He had been set apart and ordained. He had been given immense responsibility, the care of all the churches which was the greatest burden that he bore. Called to preach, called to lead, called to set the example that others could follow. He too struggled with his flesh and found himself not doing the things he wanted to do and doing the things he didn't want to do. He too battled the thorn in the flesh which continually humbled him and made him dependent on God. And so we can learn from him because he's one of us.

Follow as I read those six verses which I trust shall bring to our hearts the principles for an effective fail-proof ministry. "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but 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. For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not as pleasing men but God who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed, God is witness, 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."

In those brief six verses I find the key to a fail-proof ministry for all of us. Here is the standard of spiritual leadership laid down that can guarantee an effective ministry as God measures effectiveness.

Now by way of footnote, the tone of Paul's words here is polemic. It sounds like a defense and it is sure that it is a defense. Somehow and in some way not known to us, the church in Thessalonica was being told lies about Paul. Someone was attacking his integrity and someone or some group was attacking his sincerity. They were doing everything they could to be hostile toward the church and one way to tear up the church was to destroy its confidence in the one that God used to found it, namely Paul. This group may have included the Jews who were so utterly hostile to the gospel, it may also have included pagan Gentiles who would be hostile to it as well.

Just a little bit of a picture might help to understand how this can come to pass. The ancient world was full of phony spiritual leaders. Leon Morris writes and says this, "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. Oriental mysteries, Greek philosophy and local godlings competed for favor under the tolerant aegis of Roman indifference. Holy men of all creeds and countries, popular philosophers, magicians, astrologers, crack pots and cranks, 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," end quote.

And in that kind of a forum there was a tremendous amount of charlatanism. And it would be easy for these accusers to just throw Paul into that same bag with all of the rest of the phonies who were in it for their own personal gain of power, possessions and prestige. The accusation then was being made against Paul and no doubt against Silas and Timothy who were his partners in this ministry with the Thessalonians. The attack was against their integrity and against their sincerity. It was an effort to make the Thessalonian church believe that they were wicked intentioned men, that they were self-seeking phonies like so many others. And so Paul writes back to this church, answering his critics in a very simple, very direct way.

There's a little footnote here also that will help you. He really calls them to remember their own experience with him as validation enough. Verse 1, "You yourselves know..." Verse 2, middle of the verse, "As you know.." Verse 5, "As you know." Verse 9, "For your recall, brethren." Verse 10, "You are witnesses." Verse 11, "Just as you know." Six times in eleven verses he says let me just appeal to what you know. I was there. You don't have to take second-hand information, you had first-hand experience. And by the way, he calls on their knowledge again in chapter 3 verses 3 and 4, chapter 4 verse 2, chapter 5 verse 2 and twice in 2 Thessalonians. All they had to do was remember and that could dispel any such accusations.

But in the process of calling them to remember how he minister, he goes back and touches the principles that made his ministry effective. Now let's see where he begins in verse 1. This is a general statement about the effectiveness of his ministry, "For you yourselves, brethren, know that our

coming to you was not in vain." And he by the use of the word "our" embraces both Silas and Timothy who were with him. He says you know our coming to you was not in vain. You yourselves know it is self-evident, it was your experience, no one needs to tell you, it is obvious. In verse 9 of chapter 1 he had said, "They themselves report about you the tremendous change." Now he says you yourselves know. It isn't a report you heard from someone else, you know it by experience. Our coming to you means our entrance with the preaching of the gospel. And he says it wasn't in vain. The word *kenos* means it wasn't empty, it wasn't useless, it wasn't without product, it wasn't fruitless, it wasn't pointless, it wasn't futile. The word carries the idea of without purpose, of no effect, inconsequential, of no importance. He says that's not how it was. You know yourselves, brethren, that it was not like that. It was not a failure. Conversely, it was a success...just the opposite was true and you only have to reach back to last Sunday to remember how successful it was as we trekked our way through the tremendous richness of chapter 1 and how the Apostle Paul in verse 1 says you are a church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 2, we give thanks to God always for all of you, meaning they were all for real and genuine. And we know, he says in verse 3, your faith works, your love labors, and your hope perseveres. And verse 4, we know, brethren, you're the beloved of God, you're the elect. We know, verse 6, that you became imitators of us and of the Lord. You became examples to all the believers, verse 7. The Word of the Lord trumpeted out from you, verse 8. Verse 9, you turned from idols to serve a living and true God. And verse 10, you've been waiting for His Son to come back.

Those are all marks of a true work of God. So he says remember how it was, you don't need anybody to give you second-hand information, you saw, you experienced. The ministry was not in vain, not in vain in its quality, not in vain in its content, not in vain in its results. The quality was not hollow, it was packed with power. The content was not pointless, it was the dynamic Word of God. The impact was not shallow, it was deep and far-reaching, touching the world. A strong church was born.

So he had a powerfully effective ministry. But the question we want to ask ourselves is how. What are the ingredients that made for effective spiritual leadership? Let me give you five of them, and you have your outline if you want to note them, we'll move through those five as rapidly as we can.

Let me just say this, you will notice that each of those five principles of leadership relates to Paul's view of God. They relate to Paul's view of God. And let me say what is so very very essential for you to know. How you live your life and how you effectively operate your ministry is in direct relationship to your view of God. That is the most substantive underlying foundational element of theology in the life and ministry of anyone. Why was Paul's ministry so dynamic in Thessalonica? Because...one, he was confident in God's power. Two, he was committed to God's truth. Three, he was commissioned by God's will. Four, he was compelled by God's knowledge. And five, he was consumed with God's glory. All of us live lives that reflect our view of God.

Now let's look at these five. Number one, he was confident in God's power and that gave him tenacity. Verse 2 he says, "But 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." Simply stated, the man had such tremendous confidence in the power of God to energize his ministry and to protect him from anything that might come against him to harm him that he had a sense of invincibility. That translated immediately into boldness and courage.

The word but, *ala*, is a strong adversative. He is saying our ministry was not in vain, but on the other hand, our ministry came to you with great boldness and was full and rich and effective. Why? Because we knew the power of our God and we were confident that our God was more powerful than our opposition. That's what gives strength to the ministry, tenacity. You don't bail out.

Just to touch with what he says specifically, after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, takes us back to Acts 16, doesn't it? You remember the story of Philippi, how he wound up in jail, he and Silas. You remember that they were placed there because of the preaching of the Word of God, because they had confronted the kingdom of darkness and dispossessed a girl who was demon possessed and caused great trauma to her owners who were making a lot of money off of her. You remember that they were mistreated really two ways and that's what it indicates in those two words. The word "suffered" here has to do primarily with physical abuse and you remember they were abused physically and then put in stocks in the prison. The word "mistreated" has more to do with legal abuse and they were unjustly judged and made prisoners when they had committed no crime. So they were abused both physically and legally. You can read Acts 16:20 to 24, you'll find them very clearly outlined there.

The term for suffering is obvious, it means just that. The term for mistreatment perhaps needs a little understanding. It means to treat shamefully, to treat in an insulting way, to treat outrageously in public, calculated to insult and humiliate. So they were publicly humiliated as well as physically abused. Physical pain, public degradation. Why? For preaching the gospel. So Paul says, either after or although, you can translate that word either way, maybe we could translate it although, "Although 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."

Now what he didn't say, and I think I need to note this, what he didn't say was this, since we offended so many people in Philippi we figured we better get a better strategy. He didn't say, "You know, it was really rough up there and they didn't welcome us and they didn't accept us and if we're going to reach our culture we've got to make an adjustment here. So instead of just coming into town to preach the gospel, we're going to be a lot more subtle than that. We've got a really clever campaign so we can reach them and they won't even know what we're doing to them. In fact, we'll get them saved before they know they're saved if we do it right." No, no, he didn't say because we ran into such a terrible reaction in Philippi, we've changed our strategy. He said, because we ran into such a terrible reaction

in Philippi, we're here to do the same thing. Because the terrible reaction indicates we were preaching the truth because if you ever confront an ungodly culture with a godly message, you should have that kind of reaction.

You remember back in Acts 5 and verse 41, the wonderful testimony there, "So they went on their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name and every day in the temple and from house to house they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." What offended Jerusalem was that they preached Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews had just killed Jesus as a criminal. They came along preaching Jesus as Messiah, that was very offensive. They made them suffer. The more they made them suffer, the more they preached the message because they knew the message was touching the nerve.

So, Paul said we came to you with the courage to speak out no matter what the response might have been and no matter what the consequences were. The tone of Paul's statement, I think, makes it clear that confident preaching doesn't lead to popularity. Confident bold biblical preaching leads to conflict which requires courage and boldness.

And I have to say that the minister or the preacher's responsibility is not to minimize conflict. The preacher's job is to expose sin, to expose the symptoms of sin and the seat of sin, to confront the fatal condition of unredeemed humanity and offer the cure for their wretchedness in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We confront sin, we preach judgment, we preach law, we preach Christ crucified and we call for repentance and often what that produces is opposition.

So, he says we came and we were bold in much opposition. The word "opposition," agon, struggle, conflict, fight. The term refers to a life/death struggle, an agonizing. And in the ministry, you know, there's always pressure to compromise, there's always pressure to mitigate the message, there's always pressure not to offend someone, always pressure to soften the Word somehow, to sugar coat the message, to make it acceptable to sinners so it doesn't offend them. But that wasn't Paul's strategy.

Now where did he get this courage? Well right there in verse 2, "We had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God." We had the boldness in our God. That is the source of his confidence. His confidence is not in his flesh, it's not in his method, it's not in his cleverness, it's not in his popularity. He knew that if he preached a true message, he would not be popular. But he trusted God who would hold him up and sustain him.

What does it say in Ephesians 6:10? "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His...what?...of His might." Our strength is in God. And he believed his God to be mighty and powerful. And so he preached the gospel of God. That's a beautiful term, by the way, the gospel of God. It's used over in verse 8 and also down in verse 9 of the same chapter. It's used in Romans 1:1, it means the gospel

of which God is the source...and the gospel of which God is the subject. The gospel of God, God's gospel, the gospel from God about God, the good news from God about what God is doing for sinners through His Son Jesus Christ. He didn't alter it. He says we boldly gave God's gospel. And our boldness came because we believed in the power of our God.

I submit to you that that is a mark of effective ministry. You preach a true Word, you do not mitigate, you do not alter the gospel of God, you preach God's gospel, not your own, you preach the message that God has identified and laid out in His Word, not some other message. You do it not for popularity but for the sake of truth. And when the opposition comes, you trust in the power of your God no matter what the opposition. That's a...that's a fail-proof element for effective ministry. They counted the cost, they believed the message was right. They believed their God was powerful. And they were true to the message and true to their faith and their God and that gave them tenacity. There's more to say but let's go to point two.

He was committed to God's truth. He was not only confident in God's power but he was committed to God's truth and that gave him integrity...that gave him integrity. You see, the enemy would always think he could...he could destroy you by opposition, not Paul. Then the enemy would think that he could destroy you by questioning your integrity and having people lose their confidence in you. If he can't destroy you with sheer force. He'll try to get people to stop trusting you, to not trust the honesty or sincerity or integrity of your heart. So that attack could come as well. And in verse 3 he says this, "For our exhortation..." and by the way, the word exhortation means an urgent appeal with a view toward judgment, a cry, an appeal, a calling. And again, it speaks of the urgency, the directness of his message. But he says, "Our exhortation doesn't come from error or from impurity or by way of deceit." And undoubtedly these were the things that were being said. "Well, he's saying things that aren't true...if you really knew him you'd know he was an impure man and a deceiver...he's preaching untruth, he's preaching deception, he's a hypocrite." And so he responds.

First he says, "Our exhortation doesn't come from error." The word "error" is so interesting. It's the word plane, we get the word planet from it. The word error means to wander, to roam. That's where planet came from. Error is roaming from the truth, wandering as it were without any standard, without anything to contain or control you. So they say...Look, he's just teaching error. Paul says no, our exhortation does not come from error. He was committed to God's truth. It was accurate. He was not deceived, neither was he a deceiver. There was no false teaching here. There was only the Word of God.

Some must have accused him of ignorance, if not outright heresy or error. Perhaps the antagonistic Jews were accusing him of being ignorant of the Old Testament revelation. But he said I faithfully taught the truth, never error. Paul was a guardian of the truth. When we were studying 1 and 2 Timothy, remember I told you time and time again how Paul says to Timothy...guard the treasure. There's a guardianship. And I really believe that somehow that might be lost in the pastorate very

frequently. We are guardians of the truth, keeping it pure to hand it to the next generation. That's our responsibility.

When you look for a church don't ask how good is their music, how good is their children's program. Don't ask how clever is their preacher, how interesting is he, ask this...how well do they guard the truth...how well do they take care of the treasure of truth....that's the issue. He was a faithful guardian of the treasure of truth. First Timothy chapter 6 verse 3, "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and doesn't agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he's conceited and understands nothing." That's right. If he doesn't guard the truth, he's conceited and doesn't understand anything. Why is he conceited? Because he'd rather tell you his opinion than the truth. And how do you know he doesn't understand anything? Because if he did understand anything he'd be teaching the truth instead of his own opinion. Chapter 6 verse 20, "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you...guard it."

Second Corinthians chapter 2, one of the most provocative verses in all of Pauline literature. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:17, "We are not like many, peddling the Word of God." Hucksters, kapelos(?), con men, charlatans, peddling the Word of God insincerely for their own ends and their own goals and their own aggrandizement. But we're sincere from God and we speak in Christ in the sight of God. We're not hucksters, con men, phonies. He knew his stewardship. And that's why he reminds Timothy and all of us, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth." He was committed to God's truth. He did not speak from error. He spoke from truth.

Beloved, I'm telling you, that is the compulsion of my life, to be sure that the best I can I speak the truth. False prophets, spiritual phonies are still everywhere. Religious fakes are still common as they were then. Philosophers, magicians, astrologers, crackpots, cranks, rogues and swindlers as we said earlier, clamoring for people's minds are still all over the place. The demand for effective ministry comes down to...do you speak the truth? But he was not only committed to speaking the truth, look back at the verse, he was committed to living the truth. There is the integrity. Exhortation doesn't come from error or impurity. I speak truth out of a pure life.

Now this is fascinating. The term "impurity," akatharsia, we get the word catharsis from it which is a cleansing. This is a-catharsis, something that's unclean. The word can be used of a physical uncleanness, dirty, it can be used of some kind of social stigma, social uncleanness, but primarily refers to sexual uncleanness. And let me just open the window of your understanding a little bit on this. Most often this word seems to have sexual connotations. It has always been true, it is still true that charlatans, phonies, false teachers, false prophets are not pure in the sexual area. We have had that exposed to us in major ways, haven't we, in the scandals we've seen in the last couple of years in Christianity. That's nothing new.

In Paul's day the same thing was true. Many of the Greek cults, the mystery religions for sure, were associated with sexual perversion. And in most of the temples of the cults of ancient days there were temple prostitutes, ritual prostitution which made the sex act with a ritual prostitute a religious experience. Now that kind of religion would be very popular. False, wicked religious leaders would seek converts then for the purpose of having a sexual encounter with them. Orgies were common.

You say, "Why did they do that? What was that all about?" Listen very carefully. The spiritual leader, the religious leader was the man who was closest to God, or the temple prostitute was the woman who was closest to God. And so when you had a sexual relationship with them, that's how you got in touch with deities. That's how they sold their religion. Supposed leaders of the mystery religions were the link to deity and the link was the through the phallus, the males were the real links with deity. And so that's why they worshiped the cult of the phallus because that's how they linked up with deity. The intercourse with the leader or the charlatan or the phony religious faker was union with the deity and so intimacy with the gods was achieved through fornication.

So it was very typical then for these charlatans to come along and to woo women to themselves for the sake of sexual satisfaction under the illusion that this was a religious experience uniting them with the deities. Sort of a counterfeit church as the bride of Christ concept. By the way, the strange twist of this is the idea that began in the ancient church that virgins were encouraged to dedicate their members and their flesh to this kind of union, that's where the temple prostitutes came from. The temple prostitutes were only for the temple and for the religious leaders to enjoy. They were totally devoted to the gods and their devotion reached the gods through intercourse with the temple leaders. By the way, it might shock you to know that's where the whole concept of nuns came from. And nuns to this day often wear a wedding ring because they are wed to Christ.

What can happen in this kind of situation is they're accusing Paul of winning converts for sexual favors. Unimaginable. That's...that's perhaps what underlies the word akatharsia, lecherous love for the sake of fornication. Hey, was it common? Remember the prophetess Jezebel in chapter 2 of Revelation who teaches her followers to commit...what?...fornication? Sure, that was part of the religion.

Peter knew it. Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, 1 Peter 2, he describes the false teachers, the false leaders as sensual in verse 2. In verse 3 they exploit you. He goes further than that even, he says in verse 12 they are unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge. Verse 13, they are stains and blemishes reveling in their deceptions, they carouse, they have eyes full of adultery. That was typical among those ancient religionists.

Paul is no filthy dreamer. Paul is no fornicator. Paul is no adulterer. He speaks truth, he speaks it out of a pure life.

The third thing he says in verse 3 is that he does not come from deceit. Here he moves from preaching to living to motive. And he says, "My motive is not deceitful." The word "deceit" is *dolos*, fish hook, trap, trick, that's what it means. He's not a deceiver. The Greek false teachers would go to any length with their sorcery, their magic, their juggling, their tricks, their theatrics to gain a convert not only for sexual favors but for money. They did it for filthy...what?...lucre...sure, 2 Peter 2:15 to 18, Jude 11.

Listen, you show me a false teacher and a false prophet and I'll show you a person who is looking for sexual favors and money. The pattern has never changed. Go back to Jeremiah 23, the false shepherds in the nation of Israel were looking for the same thing. They were looking for it in Paul's time. And the false teachers and the false shepherds are still looking for it. And Satan is behind it all, disguised as an angel of light and making his ministers appear as angels of light, 2 Corinthians 11:13 to 15. There's no integrity. Paul says, "In my life there's integrity, I preach truth, I live truth, and my motives are true. I don't want your money. I don't want to be aggrandized at your expense." That's integrity. He wanted nothing but to discharge his responsibility. He spoke the truth. He lived the truth. And he was motivated truly and genuinely and not in a false way like others who were motivated purely for their own personal gain, either sexually or in terms of money.

Psalm 78, "He also chose David, His servant, took him from the sheepfolds, from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs he brought him to shepherd Jacob His people in Israel, His inheritance...why?...so he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart." God wants a shepherd who has a heart of integrity.

A third essential element of effective ministry is brought out in verse 4, the first part, he was commissioned by God's will and that gave him authority. Not only tenacity and integrity but he had authority. He was commissioned by God's will, verse 4, "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak." Stop at that point. Boy, I love that statement.

Why do you speak, Paul? Why are you doing this? Because we've been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak. We've been commissioned by God's will. I'm under divine authority and yet I have divine authority, a delegated authority. He didn't teach error...no. In fact, he taught truth and it was the truth that God entrusted to him. God entrusted with the good news. And so he moves from commitment to the truth to the commission of God by which he had that commitment.

Look at the phrase "just as we have been approved by God." It's the Greek verb *dokimazo* which means to be tested and found valid, found good, to be approved after testing. It's a perfect tense verb which means it indicates a lasting approval. We have been and continue to be approved by God. God

tested us, we passed and we are the authorized ministers of the gospel. Paul is saying...I'm not self-appointed, I'm not doing this on my own, I was called by God. And, of course, we all remember his calling, don't we, in Acts chapter 9 on the Damascus Road as he proceeded to try to execute Christians? God slammed him in the dirt, made him blind and made him bow the knee to Jesus Christ. And then put him in the ministry, brought along Ananias, he was baptized and he was sent on his way preaching Jesus Christ whom he had once persecuted. He had been entrusted with the gospel.

That particular phrase he likes to use. And he uses it on a number of occasions. First Corinthians 7:25, "Concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy." He says God trusts me. I love that. God trusts me, He trusts me with His truth, He trusts me to be His agent, He trusts me to be His emissary, He trusted me to be His minister.

Ephesians 3 verse 8, "To me the very least of all saints this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles." God gave me the grace to do it, it isn't that I am worthy apart from grace, but I am worthy in His grace. So he says I'm not self-appointed, I'm divinely commissioned, that puts authority in my life. When I speak I speak in the place of Christ. When I speak I speak in the place of God. I've been entrusted with the gospel.

We can get so far afield from that. The primary calling we have, ladies and gentlemen, we who preach the Word of God, is to dispense that which we have been entrusted with...the good news and all of its ramifications and implications. Paul says God called me, God set me apart. He says even in Galatians that he didn't even consult with men, he had such a unique training time, God trained him personally and set him apart for this ministry.

In 1 Timothy 1:11 he says, "The glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted, and I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me into service who before was a blasphemer," and so forth. We if we are in the ministry rightly have been put there by Christ. Titus 1:3, "At the proper time manifested even His Word in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior."

So here you have a man who is under command, under authority and yet has delegated authority. And I believe that we have authority in our ministry that when we speak we speak as those who have been chosen, approved, and placed by God in this world to preach His truth. So we speak...I love that. Literally, are speaking...present tense. We speak with the authority of God who approved us for ministry. In fact, at the end of verse 6 he says, as I read earlier, "We have a right to assert our authority because it is the authority of God."

And I don't believe that any of us can be effective without that authority. And what gives authority to your ministry? Speaking the Word of God powerfully and clearly. Your authority doesn't go beyond the Scripture, but, boy, when you come you better come with the message entrusted to you and know that when you preach it with power and conviction you carry the authority of God. That's what makes an effective ministry.

There's a fourth element in this. He was compelled by God's knowledge. He was compelled by God's knowledge which gave him accountability. He not only had a ministry marked by tenacity, he had a ministry marked by integrity and he had a ministry marked by authority, he also had a ministry marked by accountability. And that's the balancing point to authority in many ways. Notice again verse 4, the middle of the verse, picking up that little statement "so we speak," "Not as pleasing men but God who examines our hearts for we never came with flattering speech as you know, or with a pretext for greed." Why? "God is witness."

What's he saying? I am compelled by God's knowledge. What do you mean by that? I mean God knows everything. What motivates me is His omniscience. He examines my heart. He witnesses everything about me. That is a great measure of accountability, isn't it? In verse 4 he says, "I don't come as pleasing men, I wasn't commissioned by men, I don't preach the gospel of men, I was commissioned by God, I preach the gospel of God, I do not preach it to please men."

Nowhere does he make that more clean than in Galatians 1:10. After he has just blistered the Galatians up one side and down the other he says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men I would not be a bondservant of Christ." Apparently some had accused Paul of being a men pleaser. And after he had laced them a few times, he then says...does that sound like a men pleaser? He was no men pleaser. He spoke the truth not to please men but to please God.

There is one exception to that of great interest to us and I would just draw it to your attention lest you be confused. First Corinthians 10:33, in 1 Corinthians 10:33 Paul says, "Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many that they may be saved." What he is here saying is quite different. When he says I do not please men, he means I do not preach a message for the purpose of pleasing men. What he means when he says I do please men in 1 Corinthians 10:33 is that I will gladly sacrifice my own profit and all my own benefits in order that they might be saved. That's what he means. He doesn't mean I will fit a message that will make them happy, he means I will give my life to get them saved. I will please all men in all things in the sense that I will reach to them and try to touch them and embrace them with the gospel at any cost. But apart from that intent which is much like what he said also in Corinthians when he said I become all things to all men that by any means I might win some...he is simply saying in this context, I want to please them in the sense that I want them to know that I would give my life for them that they might know Christ. But I do not want to please them...back to 1 Thessalonians...to the extent that I

sacrificed truth, purity or true motives.

So he says, back to our text not as pleasing men but God. Why, Paul? Why are you so consumed with pleasing God? Because God examines our hearts. God examines our hearts. He's referring here by the word "heart" to the inner self, the real you, where thought and feeling and will and motive all meet. He says God scrutinizes my deepest self, God scrutinizes my motives, God scrutinizes my intentions, God knows those deep things and He knows so much that I am very aware that He will know whether I am seeking to please men or Him. And I am compelled by that knowledge.

Turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 for a moment. In verse 1 he says, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." In other words, let it be known that we are slaves, we are huperetes, under rowers, third level galley slaves, the lowest kind of slaves of Christ. We gladly take the most abject role of servanthood under Christ and we are stewards, they're guardians of the treasure of the mysteries of God, the new covenant. And with stewards, one thing is needful, that they be found...what?...trustworthy, faithful. You've been entrusted with it. Guard it. You're to be trustworthy. Then he says this, now let's talk about evaluation. "To me it's a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by any human court." It doesn't really matter to me what you think, or what any human tribunal thinks. In fact, I don't even examine myself. First of all, it doesn't matter what you think because you don't know my heart. And you're not the judge. Secondly, it doesn't even matter what I think because, verse 4, I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted. Why? Because I'm not omniscient. Even when I don't know anything against myself, God might know a lot of things against me. So you can't judge me and I can't judge me. You don't know me and you're biased against me. I know me and I am biased for me. So neither of us are valid.

Furthermore, neither of us are omniscient, and neither of us can really know all that needs to be known. By the way, beloved, that will put you in touch with the fact that you don't need to be all the time...all the time...all the time fussing over your motivation because even when you don't know something against yourself, God might know something against you, points to the fact that you're not even a totally valid critic of your own life. So you just have to yield up what you don't know to God and ask Him to make you what you ought to be. And that's what he says. The end of verse 4, "The one who examines me is the Lord." He lived under that. He says, "Look, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive for the things done in the body whether they be good or phaulos."

Hey, I'm under that. I'm under the realization that some day I'm going to stand at the Bema Seat Judgment and the Lord is going to reward me for what He knows. Verse 5, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the hidden things in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts and then each man's praise will come to him from God." That's accountability, beloved. My accountability is not to the church. And I have said this. Sometimes people say, "Well, you know, John, you need to have more accountability to

men because you might fall into sin." Listen, I could have accountability to a hundred men and you can't...none of those men can guard my thoughts, none of those men can guard the intentions of my heart. No one can police that but my own heart and the knowledge in my heart that God sees everything. That is the highest level of accountability. That is the point of accountability. First Chronicles 28:9 says, "The Lord searches the heart." Revelation 2:23 Christ says, "I am He that searches the heart." And in verse 5 he says, "Look, we...we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed, God is witness." And he applies it. Hey, God knows, God knows we didn't do that cause God knows everything about us. You might be used to people who flatter you and you might be used to people who are greedy and they come with a pretext or a pretension and they want gain, they want physical sexual favors, they want money, they want power, they want prestige. We didn't come that way, God is witness. We live under the scrutiny of God. Your typical verbal hucksters may be hypocrites, those liars with demon theology spawned by the pit may be hypocrites, we never came with flattering speech.

You know what flattery is? It's a form of exploitation. Flattery is based on the fact that everybody's ego loves to hear good things about themselves, right? We love to hear good things about ourselves. Now if you say a good thing about a person and you have no intent other than to say good about them, that's not flattery. If you say a good thing about a person and have in your mind some purpose for that which will come to your benefit, that's flattery. So you say something good to someone as a ploy to win them to yourself for self interest and personal gain. You set them up for your own deceptive purposes. Proverbs 29:5 says, "A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps." Proverbs 26:28 says, "A flattering mouth works ruin." And because people are so egotistical, when people say nice things about them they get sucked in.

There's a very vivid illustration of God's attitude toward flattery in Psalm 12:3, "May the Lord cut off flattering lips." The purpose of flattery is to gain power over people, a common ploy among religious charlatans. Paul says we didn't do that because God's watching.

Secondly, we didn't come with a pretext for greed. Not only did they want power but they want possessions. This is to gain possessions. The pretext means they hide their real intent. The word "pretext" is cloak, it's an over cloak, covering the real intent. We didn't come putting a coat over our greed. Let me tell you, false teachers all the same, they want sexual favors, they want money, they wear a cloak, they'll flatter you to gain you and then they'll strip you naked. Paul says I have not put a spiritual robe over my greed, I'm not in the ministry for money, I'm not in the ministry to get you. You remember what he said in Acts 20, "I have coveted no man's silver and no man's...what?...gold and I have worked with my hands so that I don't make the gospel chargeable to anybody. God sees my motives. God sees my heart. I have tremendous accountability.

Finally, in the last verse, he was consumed with God's glory and that gave him humility. He was consumed with God's glory and that gave him humility. Verse 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." We didn't look for esteem. We didn't look for honor. We didn't want praise. We aren't Diotrefes. The word zeteo here, seek, means to habitually seek. We weren't habitually seeking honor, habitually seeking awards and laurels and stroking and appreciation dinners and attention and accolades, and applause and plaudits and prestige. The only glory Paul ever sought was eternal, right?-- 2 Corinthians 4:5. But he never sought what belonged to God, 1 Corinthians 9:16 he said, "Look...16 to 18, he said...don't commend me, don't honor me, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." I'm not worthy of any reward, I didn't ask to be in the ministry, God placed me in the ministry. Don't commend me. Even though as Apostles we could have asserted our authority, we were too preoccupied with all the glory going to Him. We were specially called messengers. An Apostle here means in the very technical sense Paul who was one of THE Apostles and in a less specific sense, Silas and Timothy who were apostles not apostles of Christ, that is chosen by Him, but apostles of the church chosen by the church. Apostles can stretch beyond the Twelve and Paul to embrace others, such as Epaphroditus.

So he said we had some delegated authority but we never asserted ourselves and we never sought honor, prestige. We never sought the chief seats, we never sought to be the big shot. We knew our authority had to stop and be balanced with accountability and humility.

It's kind of a three-legged stool that you sit on. If you have a throne it has three legs, authority, yes, delegated from Christ to speak His Word boldly and powerfully. Accountability, yes, you better know that God knows everything you're doing and every thought and intent of your heart. And humility, yes, you better be sure you seek not the praise of men but that you give all the glory to God. Paul never said it better than he said it in the glorious doxology of Romans 11, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever, amen." Humility.

What makes an effective ministry? Tenacity, because you trust totally in the power of God. Integrity, because you're fully committed to the truth of God. Authority, because you know you have on your life the commission of God. Accountability, because of the knowledge of God, He knows everything. Humility, because you are consumed with the glory of God. Bow your heads with me.

Let me ask some questions particularly to those of you who serve in spiritual leadership. Ask yourself this, will you? In the moment of silence...am I willing to be bold no matter what the opposition, confident in God's power? Am I willing to be a pure vessel with a pure message and a pure motive committed to God's truth? Am I willing to wield the sword of spiritual authority, the Word, without compromise, commissioned by God's will? Am I willing to guard my heart motives and be utterly unselfish, compelled by God's omniscience? Am I willing to seek only His honor and humble myself, consumed by His glory? If yes to these, my ministry will not be in vain.

Father, confirm these things to our hearts this morning. Thank You for this rich hour together in Your Word. Make us what You want us to be. Give us leaders like Paul. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/52-4_FailProof-Spiritual-Leadership?q=fail+proof

COPYRIGHT (C) 2010 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/MeetGTU/Copyright>).