



THE MARKS OF A TRUE MINISTRY, PART 1

Week #6; June 14, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- It was February 8 when we had our last lesson from **1 Thessalonians**.
- We're in this series I've called "**1 & 2 Thessalonians: Faithful Endurance in One Direction**," but we've had a few detours over the past four months. For example:
 - The conflict in Iran started, so we had a special lesson on what the Bible has to say about that important situation.
 - As I shared in that lesson – we should be anticipating more developments over there. From a prophetic standpoint, the full story is not done in that part of the world.
 - Then there was the recent social media frenzy claiming the government was meeting with pastors and encouraging them to prepare their congregants for alien disclosure.
 - We had two lessons to unpack what God's Word says about these obscure matters - - and to keep us from falling victim to the world's ideas.
- But the longest of those detours was the five-part special series, "**Jesus Saved Me – Now I Have Some Questions**."
- That special series was based on things we encountered as we completed **1 Thessalonians Ch. 1**, and so we had five lessons on five key questions:
 1. How should we properly define the Gospel?
 2. Does God choose us, or do we choose Him?
 3. Do we have eternal security if we are believers?
 4. Why do we struggle with doubts about our salvation?
 5. What can we know about the issue of 'backsliding?'
- Diving into those questions was a great exercise for us – it was a good supplement to the things we learned from **1 Thessalonians Ch. 1**.
- All these lessons, and more, are easy to find on our NEWLY upgraded website. There are some changes there at www.solidbreadcommunity.com Check it out.
- We're not done with all the changes we need to make, and there will still be some good additions and big surprises ahead, so be watching it.

NOTE: Now we come to **1 Thessalonians Ch. 2**, and Paul moves in a new direction. However, he continues to use the same empirical processes he established in **Ch. 1**.

- In **Ch. 1**, Paul laid out a series of reason (they are evidences) for why he KNEW the Thessalonian believers were chosen by God for salvation.
- These are demonstrable elements which Paul saw for himself. He says they PROVE these new believers had true faith. Paul lists these things in **vss. 4-10 of Ch. 1**.
- Now, as **Ch. 2** begins, Paul continues a similar ‘train of thought.’ He’s still thinking about the qualities of true faith. He continues to distill his points down to well-defined bits of evidence.
- But now in **Ch. 2**, Paul is no longer focused on the marks of true personal salvation. He now focuses on the marks of true ministry (**READ 1 Thess. 2:1-4**).

NOTE: (We’ll see how far we get today) – But, let me segue into this passage with a question: “What are the marks of a true ministry?”

1. I could ask this question several other ways: “What is a faithful ministry?” “What is a ministry that can be trusted?” (And so on). For our purposes, I’m going with, **“What are the marks of a true ministry?”**
 - It’s evident just from asking this question that not all ministries are **true**. Not all of them conform to God’s parameters for how ministries should be.
 - By ‘ministries,’ we are obviously talking about churches – that’s the bulk. But, we’re not limited to that. There are parachurch organizations, missions’ organizations, Bible studies, schools, and even music-based ministries.
 - There are various kinds of ministries, and so we need to know how to answer this question, **“What are the marks of a true ministry?”**
2. It’s an important question, because – as we’re going to learn – a TRUE ministry is marked by certain Biblical guidelines.
 - For example, **if we’re talking about churches**, then the following things are laid out clearly in God’s Word – and these things should **not** be compromised:
 - **First, churches should be faithful to the declaration of the Gospel** – as we learned in a previous lesson this ‘Gospel’ issue means two things: #1 / something **general** and #2 / something **specific**.
 - ✓ **(General):** they should accurately teach the FULL counsel of God’s Word. This means **Genesis to Revelation**.

NOTE: Paul says very clearly in **2 Timothy 3:16**, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”*

Paul emphasizes that ALL Scripture is beneficial for four things. Not SOME Scripture - - but ALL of it! And here’s an easy way to remember those four things:

- #1, for *“teaching”* – that’s for telling us what **is** right,
- #2, for *“rebuking”* – that’s for calling out what is **not** right,
- #3, for *“correcting”* – that’s for returning us **back** to what is right,
- #4, for *“training in righteousness”* – that’s for growing us in the things that **are** right.

NOTE: This is the right approach to take with the ‘general’ Gospel in view. Now, let’s see how churches should NOT compromise this ‘general’ Gospel matter:

- ✓ They should not avoid the OT or leapfrog ANY themes or doctrines. They should not swim endless laps in the NT or just stay in parts of Paul’s epistles (which some studies show that 50% of churches do).
- ✓ They should not focus only on Jesus Christ’s FIRST coming; they also need to teach properly about His SECOND coming.
- ✓ They should not force Scripture to mean something it’s NOT saying, or to avoid what it IS saying.
- ✓ The point is, ALL of God’s Word needs to be accurately taught; that’s what is meant by the **general Gospel**.
- ✓ **(Then there is the “Specific” Gospel):** churches should properly teach the message of salvation. They should responsibly teach the ‘good news of the Gospel’ against the backdrop of the ‘bad news’ (like getting a loan).
- ✓ This is obvious! There is no ‘good news of the Gospel’ without the ‘bad news.’ We MUST understand that we are born into sin, and we are wretched, lost, and depraved in our sinful nature.
- ✓ There can be no ‘good news of the Gospel’ till we first know we cannot save ourselves - and we are doomed to eternal Hell unless we believe in Jesus Christ and we place our faith in HIM.
- ✓ There is no ‘good news of the Gospel’ if it is not made clear that we can **accept** His gift of grace that He offers to us by His shed blood on the cross.
- ✓ There is no ‘good news of the Gospel’ unless we understand that Jesus Christ has paid the full penalty of our sin, and only He can keep us from eternally perishing.
- ✓ You can already see the BIG problem. Many churches preach a watered-down ‘Gospel.’ They don’t provide all the information.
- ✓ They focus on the ‘good news’ without telling the ‘bad news.’ That is just partial truth. It is ineffective and it makes no sense - - and I feel it has resulted in many people having **suspect faith**.
- ✓ Other churches go even further down the wrong track: they do precisely what Paul warns against in **Galatians 1:8-9**. They *‘preach a Gospel contrary to the one we preached to you.’*
- ✓ They change or dilute the message of salvation that is **“by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.”**
- ✓ The bottom line for churches is this: **they should be faithful to the declaration of the complete Gospel.** But many – despite what they claim - are not.

NOTE: I'm introducing this theme of the marks of true ministry. Let's stay with the example of churches as we continue to outline things they should not compromise. We were just reminded that they need to faithfully declare the complete Gospel.

- **Second, churches need to prioritize sound doctrine.**
 - This means THREE very important things **all at the same time:**
 - ✓ **#1**, it is about providing 'meat' and not 'milk.' Many churches today – probably 'most' - dispense a spiritual diet that can be sipped through a straw. It's milk.
 - ✓ Paul lamented in **1 Corinthians 3:2** that the **young** believers he was writing to were not yet ready for "*solid food.*" He said they needed 'milk' instead.
 - ✓ **Hebrews 5:12** specifically says that '*solid food*' should be the goal of what is taught in the church. Sound doctrine needs to be taught deeply and accurately, and this passage in **Hebrews** amounts to a rebuke to churches that fail to do this.
 - ✓ **#2**, and concerning this need to **prioritize sound doctrine**, churches need to focus on God's Word. As **Acts 2:42** says, the NT church "*devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching.*"
 - ✓ That means churches today should not leap onto the latest Christian bandwagon, movement, or fad (think the 'Purpose Driven Church,' the 'Emergent Church,' or 'The Gospel Coalition' as some cases in point).
 - ✓ They should not be holding a wet thumb in the breeze to comply with the latest marketing research, the latest info provided by a consultant, the latest government mandates, and the latest cultural trends and woke views.

IMPORTANT: Churches should NOT be paying **any** attention to self-appointed prophets and apostles. This is very dangerous territory.

- ✓ Churches should not be giving attention to so-called visions and extra-biblical revelations that claim something OTHER than what God's Word says - or they basically regurgitate what God's Word ALREADY says - as though they are now offering something special (there is no need to mysteriously repackage something the Bible **already** plainly states).
- ✓ Bottom line: churches need to focus **on the Bible**. They need to pay most attention to teaching its truth rather than running a business - - or worrying about 'nickels and noses.'
- ✓ **#3**, and still staying with this need to **prioritize sound doctrine**, churches need to focus on '*edifying and equipping the saints.*'

Ephesians 4:12 instructs churches "*to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*"

- ✓ Churches are not supposed to be ‘attractive to the lost.’ That sounds good, but it’s not a Biblical concept. In fact, churches should feel totally foreign to anyone who is unsaved and who is steeped in the world’s ideas and methods.
- ✓ But - - churches should be FULL of answers to the questions that unsaved people have. This happens when churches boldly teach the truth and when they prioritize sound doctrine.
- ✓ It is in **that kind of ministry** that the convicting nature of the Holy Spirit can work. You will not find any healthy and growing church in the NT that did not **prioritize sound doctrine**.

NOTE: I’m still laying an introductory foundation here as we assess the marks of a true ministry. I’ll make a few more quick comments about churches as an example, and what the ministry of churches should look like **from a Biblical standpoint**.

- **They should be known for having a strong focus on The Lord’s Supper.**
 - It’s evident from **Acts 2:42-47** that this was a clear mark of the NT church. It was – by far – a much bigger priority than most churches make The Lord’s Supper today.
 - As we’ve learned in Solid Bread Community, there is a strong focus on having a right relationship with Jesus Christ and with others in The Lord’s Supper.
- **They should be known for having tight fellowship.**
 - Again, from the same passage in **Acts**, the NT church was one that “*was together,*” they met each other’s needs, they “*met together at the temple and in their homes,*” and they “*ate together.*”
 - In multiple ways, churches today should be KNOWN for their tight fellowship and for all the ways they foster that.
- **They should be known for their emphasis on prayer.**
 - In fact, in **Acts 2:42**, prayer is given prominence - along with properly celebrating The Lord’s Supper and being devoted to the sound teaching of God’s Word.
- **They should be known for having the right kind of leadership** (the things I am about to say will be politically and culturally incorrect, but they ARE the truth from the Bible).
 - Churches are instructed to follow the leadership model of a Godly group of Elders rather than having a ‘dictatorial’ or heavy-handed single leader. This is stated in multiple places in Scripture.
 - Just so you know, the Bible does not specifically address the role of a Senior Pastor. One would be hard-pressed to make a strong case that the modern role of a Senior Pastor conforms to the Biblical model.
 - This role of Senior Pastor has come into vogue as churches became the kind of cultural and business organizations they have now become.

- The same is even MORE true for Executive Pastor, Youth Pastor, and Music Pastor. These roles are simply **not** found in Scripture - nor is there any focus on 'youth' or 'music' within the NT church.
- Again - these things are 'cultural' models, and they may sometimes steer us AWAY from a more essential Biblical model (i.e. the need for intergenerational fellowship).
- Furthermore, and this one may rub a lot of fur the wrong way – but **deal with it!** The Bible is clear: a woman should not be exercising spiritual authority over a man.
- **Let me translate:** the Bible does not support the idea of a woman pastor or elder. That does not mean there is no role for women in the church - - there are plenty of roles, and they are important ones.
- The Bible is clear that women have various vital functions to play in the church – but specifically being a pastor or elder is not one of them.
- Do your own study on this issue if you don't like what I'm saying - - **be as the Bereans**, but make sure you yield to what God says in His Word.

NOTE: Again, backtracking here - - I'm setting a foundation concerning this operative question, **“What are the marks of a true ministry?”** And while there are various kinds of ministries (as we've acknowledged), we've reviewed churches as one example.

But here are some basic points that apply to ALL ministries – and these are already clear from the things we've just learned:

1. A TRUE ministry is marked by agreeing with what God's Word says.
2. A FALSE ministry is marked by disagreeing with what God's Word says.
3. A TRUE ministry is marked by conforming to God's standards and structures.
4. A FALSE ministry is marked by conforming to the world's standards and structures.
5. A TRUE ministry is marked by recognizing the Bible as inerrant, complete, and authoritative.
6. A FALSE ministry is marked by challenging the inerrancy, completeness, and authority of the Bible.
7. A TRUE ministry will support sound doctrinal teachings and principles.
8. A FALSE ministry will not support sound doctrinal teachings and principles.
9. (and so on and so on.....you can see the pattern here).

NOTE: Now, let's return our attention to **1 Thessalonians 2:1-4**. Let's start looking at some marks of a true ministry which are not as obvious as those things we've just reviewed. We'll march through this passage and see what we learn and how far we get....

A. “our visit to you was not a failure...” (vs. 1)

1. Literally, Paul is saying his ministry to this Thessalonian group was not without results. It was not useless or futile.
 - One mark of a true ministry is it is productive. It yields fruit. There are results.

- Plenty of different kinds of ministries have formed for various reasons and purposes – but not all of them yield fruit. **Here are some good questions to consider on this matter (these are not exhaustive):**
 - Are people being saved? Are people repenting and getting back on the right track spiritually? (A true ministry will show the **convicting** impact of God’s Word when it’s properly presented).
 - Are people “showing that they’re growing?” Are they helping others to also mature in their faith? (A true ministry will move people **together** in a right direction.)
 - Is the ministry experiencing the spiritual blessings of God upon it? Are new outreach opportunities emerging? (A true ministry will be grown **by God**. In **Acts 2:47** it says, “...and the Lord added to their number daily...”)
 - Is the ministry receiving the physical blessings of God upon it? (Does God provide the resources, and does He address the needs? Or, is it trying to **force** something to happen by pursuing obscure laws, latitudes, and loopholes that give its plans a risky opportunity? The bottom line is “*Where God guides, He provides.*”)
- Paul further says, concerning this issue of his ministry showing results, “**You KNOW...**” You see that in the opening of **vs. 1**.
 - This element of showing results or yielding fruit should be plain to everyone. It should be self-evident.
 - A TRUE ministry should not have to conjure up numbers (or hide them), it should not have to employ careful language, cautious committees, or covert deals to show what is going on. **It should be obvious to all.**
 - God does not hide His ways. When Elijah appealed to the Lord in **1 Kings Ch. 18** to bring down fire from heaven and consume the sacrifice that all the priests of Baal could not get lit, God came through in a miraculous way.
 - In **vss. 38-39** it says, “*When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”* **God does not hide His power and authority.**
 - When the church began on the original Day of Pentecost, we saw that “*the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*” **God does not hide His blessing.**
 - When Ninevah was spared after the city repented of their sins, **Jonah 3:10**, the Lord “*...did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.*” **God does not hide His compassion.**
 - When Paul was bit by a poisonous snake in **Acts 28:3**, the men around Paul fully expected him to die, but he did not. **God does not hide His protection.**
 - In these ways, and in many others like them, this operative point is clear. Where TRUE ministry is taking place, it is KNOWN to all.

B. “...we had previously suffered and been insulted....(we faced) strong opposition” (vs. 2)

NOTE: This will be a challenging point for some of you to wrap your heads around, but there is clear Scriptural basis for it: **a TRUE ministry is marked by strong opposition.**

1. This fact runs against the grain of shallow thinking.
 - Conventionally, it is stated that if a ministry is ‘running uphill’ much of the time, or if it is facing various stiff struggles, then “God must not be in it.”
 - I have heard this sort of thing many times (I’ll use SBC as an example):
 - When SBC was a Sunday School class, and it was flourishing and growing, it faced relentless and unwarranted attacks from various places and people.
 - When SBC needed to find its own location so its teaching ministry could continue, we struggled to find a suitable spot. I was told by several people then, “This is too difficult. God has obviously shut the door.”
 - Whenever SBC has faced fierce hostilities from various churches and their leadership for emphasizing doctrine and for teaching Bible prophecy, I’ve been advised by others to “Tone it down,” and to “Focus on more acceptable topics.”
 - When SBC began to place a strong emphasis on The Lord’s Supper, I had several people tell me they would not support that. They said they would no longer attend because “SBC was not a church, and it shouldn’t be doing that.”
 - I’ll stop there because the operative issue here is clear. Other people and ministries could tell their own similar stories too.
2. The fundamental truth is, **a true ministry is marked by strong opposition.** This is not hard to understand.
 - Effective and TRUE ministries often face this intense opposition because their work is effectively advancing the Kingdom of God.
 - Truth is being boldly proclaimed. People are getting saved, and they are growing. God is glorified, and lives are being changed. People are ACTING like Christians and not just TALKING like they are....
 - Satan does not need to worry about ministries that are woke, that have rejected clear Biblical doctrine(s), that have chosen to put God in a box of their own preference, that interpret God’s Word however they want to, and that have conformed to ideas and structures of man’s design rather than God’s.
 - Satan’s already got those ministries where he wants them. They are weak and lukewarm. It is often the case that ministries which face no opposition are not nearly as effective as they think they are.
 - Satan doesn’t need to devote resources to where the flames of truth are barely sputtering. He needs to focus on putting out the big fires instead.

- And this is precisely why Paul says he faced this kind of **strong opposition**.
 - He was telling the Gospel in **vs. 2**. In **Ch. 1**, Paul was guiding this body of believers to be strong and active in their faith, and their reputation was the proper one. The right things were happening for the Kingdom of God.
 - And so, if you look at the greater context here, Paul faced **strong opposition**. He was persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, and insulted. He faced all kinds of personal hardship, as did the ministries he led.
 - And we will learn when we transition into **2 Thessalonians**, there was another kind of **strong opposition** at play. Paul had to labor against people who wanted to resist Biblical truth.
 - He had to battle against heresy and errant doctrines. He had to contend with false teachers. He had to encourage folks to persevere when they got discouraged, became fearful, and they wanted to give up.
 - He needed to return people’s focus to the full counsel of God’s Word when others just wanted to emphasize parts of it.

- 3. But there is another point to be made that is related to this **strong opposition** a true ministry will face. It is about ‘endurance,’ (and I’ll wrap up with this point).
 - This endurance is implied in **vs. 2** rather than being clearly stated. Paul is not a quitter. He continues to do what he’s been called to do despite all the resistance.
 - A **true** ministry is marked by endurance in the face of **strong opposition**. It does not cower or retreat when it encounters difficulties and hostilities. It does not blink when it faces attacks for doing and saying what is right.
 - A **true** ministry is not seeking worldly comfort or conformity. A **true** ministry, and the people that are part of it will remain loyal to God.
 - They will rely on God to supply their needs, to bolster their courage, to faithfully endure in one direction, and to share the message of the Gospel to those who are desperately seeking answers.



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Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God’s Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don’t pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don’t teach what is NOT there. Don’t force a passage to mean something it really doesn’t.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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