



THE MARKS OF A TRUE MINISTRY, PART 2

Week #7; June 21, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- Last week, we began to look at the question, “What are the marks of a true ministry?” and our text was **1 Thessalonians 2:1-2**.
- We learned a TRUE ministry is one that is marked by certain Biblical guidelines.
- We saw that there are different kinds of ministries, but none of them can be regarded as TRUE if they:
 - disagree with what God’s Word says,
 - conform to the world’s standards and structures,
 - challenge the inerrancy, completeness, and authority of the Bible,
 - (and if they do) not support sound doctrinal positions and principles.
 - (and so on...).
- Regardless of what type of ministry we may be talking about, there are certain basic standards which cannot be violated if that ministry is to be called ‘TRUE.’
- We then looked at the not-so-obvious marks of a true ministry, and these things are lifted directly from our text in **1 Thessalonians Ch. 2**. We saw that....
 - **First**, a true ministry is productive. It yields fruit. There are results. It’s why Paul says in **2:1**, “*Our visit to you was not a failure.*”
 - This element of yielding fruit should be plain to everyone. It should be self-evident. It’s why Paul says in **verse one**, “*You KNOW...*”
 - The results of a TRUE ministry should be apparent, and they should grow and nourish the kingdom of God in clear and tangible ways.
 - **Second**, a true ministry is one that faces “*strong opposition.*” This fact is borne out in **2:2**, and this is not something many folks want to sign up for...
- The fact that a true ministry is marked by facing stiff struggles runs against the typical reaction folks have when they exclaim instead, “God must not be in it.”
 - In our time and culture, we have equated the very kind of challenges of being IN the will of God with the conclusion that we are OUT of the will of God. This is not Biblical.
 - As we learned, Satan does not need to worry about ministries that are woke, that have rejected the truth of Scripture, that have chosen to put God in a box of their own preference, that handle God’s Word however they want to, and that have adopted ideas and structures of man’s design rather than God’s.

NOTE: That is an overview of the things we learned last time. We went into a lot more depth, and the video and lesson notes are online.

This week, I want to pick up where we left off, and to get a running start, I want to read **vss. 3 and 4 of 1 Thessalonians Ch. 2 (READ)**.

Let's continue to unpack this question, "What are the marks of a TRUE ministry?" - - and again, in our text here, we are seeing more of the not-so-obvious answers.

A. "...(for we do not have) error, impure motive, or trickery..."

NOTE: Here, Paul is referring to his purpose, his intentions, and his practices.

1. He affirms his motives are sound. One mark of a true ministry is it leaves no room for a crowbar of deceit or cunning to be wedged in.
 - A true ministry is noted for its integrity. Let me put that another way: it is straightforward. It is not trying to 'pull the wool over anyone's eyes.'
 - Within our own area, I know of churches that voted over and over in a business meeting – even adjusting the bylaws as they did so – until the leaders of that church finally got the outcome they wanted.
 - I've heard of churches dropping key doctrinal stances from their online information to not offend members of their congregation that were living in sin.
 - I know of churches that preached from Aesop's Fables or a secular movie script, but not from the Bible.
 - I've heard of various ministries setting up alternate outreaches with the covert objective of disguising a greater income for its leadership.
 - I've known churches that have made critical decisions based on a dream somebody in leadership had, or they changed their name to be more mainstream and to dilute a sound Biblical heritage.
 - I've known ministries who have publicly flip-flopped on key initiatives and directions, or they become embroiled in risky and unwise financial decisions – all while claiming they have received new and updated calling and direction from God.
 - I think you get my point: our world today is saturated with various 'ministries' that have operated without transparency, without integrity, and without purity.
 - Paul wants no part of any of that, and so he describes in **vs. 3** what really motivates him:
 - He does not want to please people – he wants to please God.
 - He does not want to 'trick' people or be underhanded in any way – he wants to honor God with his integrity.
 - He does not want to overlook any possible invasion of error or impure motive – instead, he is straightforward about those things, and he says clearly they are not a part of his ministry. He has nothing to hide.

2. Basically, what we are seeing in **vs. 3** is a partial explanation for the boldness and endurance that is outlined in **vs. 2**.
 - Paul categorically denies three false motives in **vs. 3** that he was – apparently - accused of: *“error, impure motives, and trickery.”*
 - He makes the point that had “they” (that’s Paul, Silas, and Timothy – **Cf. 1:1**) acted under any of these false motives that they were accused of, then they would have been unable to preach the Gospel as they did under the severe circumstances.

NOTE: Here’s an important insight: Just as a person’s character is proven when they **properly** endure under adversity - - so a TRUE ministry is proven the very same way.

- a. I’ve seen various ministries collapse when finances did not conform to presumptive spreadsheets and projections. Things became more uncertain, and less black and white. The situation exposed the immaturity of leaning on man’s business plans rather than leaning on God’s Word.
- b. I’ve seen churches split when some people wanted to tolerate sin and others did not. Rather than deal with these things as God’s Word outlines, they became fearful and “closed shop.” It was easier for them to duck and run, than stand true and firm.
- c. I’ve seen ministries dry, curl up, and fade away when they faced accusations that were unfair and untrue. They could have stood their ground and “keep on keeping on,” but the adversity intimidated them.
- d. I’ve seen young pastors go “all over the place” telling their story that they felt ‘called to start a church’ - - only to give up and walk away when the work to do that became way too hard.
- e. **(Likewise)** – I’ve seen ministries that persevered, sweated, and endured with each difficult step to do the things they knew God wanted them to do. Their numbers may not have been huge, but their effectiveness was very clear. They were faithful under adversity.
- f. I’ve seen missionaries labor for many years to establish God’s work. They did all this without any of the ordinary proofs of success - - but they KNEW God was behind it all. Then suddenly, there was a tidal wave of results and fruit. They had properly endured, and God blessed that faithfulness.
 - Paul’s point is one we should ALL reflect on: the challenges we face will expose our shaky foundations. Paul equates the endurance and validation of his ministry with the point that he had no false motives.
 - One mark of a TRUE ministry is the simple fact that *“error, impure motive, or trickery”* is absent. Instead - - God is in it! He has raised it, and He holds it together.
 - Consequently, there is boldness with the truth, there is endurance in the race, and there is faithfulness under adversity.

B. “...we speak as men approved by God...”

- Let me paraphrase what Paul is saying. He says, “*God trusts us to do what we’re doing because WE passed HIS test.*”
- Many ministries are led by people who cannot say what Paul is saying here: they are not “*approved by God.*”
 - They may want to be known as ‘pastors’ and ‘elders,’ but that doesn’t mean they’ve met the qualifications of **1 Timothy 3:1-7** or of **Titus 1:5-9**. Simply put, they are not “*approved by God.*”
 - They may have academic degrees from seminaries, but that just means they got all the assignments done.
 - It says nothing about their character or their gifting. It says nothing about their ability to “*rightly handle the Word of Truth*” (**Cf. 2 Tim. 2:15**). It does not mean they are “*approved by God.*”
 - They may be young, they may dress in skinny jeans and untucked shirts - they may be eloquent, able to play a guitar, shed tears and raise their hands on cue, and joke in ways that make the college crowd crack up - - but that does not mean they are “*approved by God.*”
 - Their church may be growing in attendance, their leaders might be getting a generous benefits package, and their auditorium might have all the latest ‘bells and whistles,’ - - but again, that does not mean they are “*approved by God.*”
- The point is made - like the others I’ve made before - we need to be **super careful** that we do not equate the terms of man’s praises, man’s successes, man’s comforts, and man’s methods with God’s validation, and *with God’s approval!*
 - Job endured his greatest humility and suffering while being in the center of God’s will.
 - Joseph did what was right – and he was tossed into a pit, falsely accused, sold into slavery, and thrown into prison.
 - Elijah stood alone and displayed the power of God against the enemies of God – then he had to run for his life.
 - Daniel faithfully served his human masters, but not at the expense of serving God FIRST. And for this, he was demoted, thrown to the lions, and blackmailed.

NOTE: Here’s the bottom line. Our minds and hearts are in very dangerous territory when we define God’s approval as being synonymous with our positive circumstances and outcomes.

- Most of us know about the text of **Hebrews Ch. 11**. It has been called the ‘hall of faith’ in the Bible. Why?
- It is filled with the examples of many OT people who had displayed their faithfulness to God.
- Put another way, they were in God’s will. They were “doing what God wanted them to do.” And.....they were “*approved by God.*”

- But - - (**READ Hebrews 11:35-38**). This is a summary of adversities, trials, pains, heartaches, endurance, and humility. But guess what? They were ALL doing what God wanted them to do - - they were all “*approved by God.*”
- It’s the same with Paul. He says in **1 Thess. 2:4** that he and his ministry had faced strong opposition as they served this body of believers, but he says they were “*approved by God.*”
- That means, *God had tested their motives, and they had passed. God had found them worthy of their calling.*”
- A TRUE ministry is marked by being “*approved by God.*” And that often means GOOD things show up under BAD circumstances.

C. “...(we were) entrusted with the Gospel...”

NOTE: This is also a point found in **vs. 4**, and I just want to make a couple of comments about this since we’ve studied “*the Gospel*” a lot within SBC.

- The “Gospel” is – **in the larger sense** – the faithful and accurate declaration of the FULL counsel of God’s Word.
- It is responsibly teaching all of it. It’s teaching what IS there, and it’s not teaching what’s NOT there.
- (and) the “Gospel” is – **in the specific sense** – the clear declaration of sin and the faithful proclamation of the salvation message.
- It is properly telling the bad news and properly telling the good news.

1. Now – let’s look at this word “*entrusted.*”

- Paul is confessing that God has confidence in him. God sees Paul as having the credibility to do the job.
 - This “*entrusted*” element means this calling – or this ministry - is something that God GAVE to Paul. Paul did not seek it out for himself.
 - He did not wake up one day feeling confused and confounded about his personal life’s circumstances - - and so he suddenly felt a ‘calling to go to the mission field’ where he could reinvent himself with a new group of people.
 - That’s not always the case, but I’ve seen those dynamics a lot. I’ve also seen where folks say they’re ‘called’ into one ministry, but that doesn’t work out so well – so suddenly they feel ‘called’ into another ministry.
 - That doesn’t work out so well either - - and years later they are still leaping from one ‘calling’ to the next. As my last point suggested, they are showing they are not “*approved by God.*”

NOTE: But Paul was not self-appointed, and so he was not ministering on his own authority - but he was ministering on God's authority. He had been ‘*entrusted.*’

- When Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road, the Lord **entrusted** him with the Gospel. God declared to Ananias (who was wary of Paul) in **Acts 9:15-16:**

“Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.”

- Paul speaks of being “*entrusted*” in his ministry in multiple places in the NT. One example is in **1 Timothy 1:11-12** where Paul says:

*“According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which **I have been entrusted.** I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, **putting me into service.**”*

(Another passage is **Titus 1:3**) – *“and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching **entrusted** to me **by the command** of God our Savior,”*

- In these passages we see a direct link between being “*entrusted*,” and being “*put into service.*”
 - If you are truly “*entrusted*” with a ministry, you will be active with it. And you will be BUSY. It takes ‘service,’ and that means humility, endurance, “stick-to-it-iveness,” and patience.
 - There is nothing passive about being “*put into service.*” There is nothing easy or comfortable about it.
 - I am extremely wary of Christian leaders that teach a 25-minute shallow devotional once a week (...that AI helped them with).
 - Then - - after a couple of years of doing that, they take a 3-6 month ‘sabbatical’ to recharge and rest before they return and ask for a pay raise.
 - There is nothing about any of that which is Biblical or noble. Paul never tapped the brakes or took a ‘sabbatical.’ Nor did any of the other apostles.
- There is also a connection between being “*entrusted*” and receiving “*the command*” of God. We see that in the verse from **Titus.**
 - I believe we use the word “calling” too casually and too often in Christian circles.
 - At this point in my life, I’m suspicious of folks that toss that word around. Usually, it means they haven’t thought through what they are doing very well.
 - If God entrusts one to carry out a ministry – the Bible makes the case there is a clear directive behind that.
 - A TRUE ministry will endure the gauntlet it faces because it has been ‘**called into service.**’ It knows it has been ‘**commanded.**’

D. “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”

NOTE: This is a **VERY** important mark of a TRUE ministry. It does not matter what **type** of ministry it is, or where and when it functions, or who is in it.

1. If it is trying to please men – if it is seeking the praises of men, and if it covets the adulations of others – then I need to be clear: it is **not** of God. Paul is forthright.
 - You cannot have it both ways. It’s the same principle of **Matthew 6:24** – “*you cannot serve two masters.*” Complete devotion requires undivided loyalty.
 - That is a **tough** truth – but it’s a **straightforward** truth. Faithful leaders are not out for any kind of personal attention or recognition.
 - Faithful and TRUE Christian leaders do not let everyone know they **want** to be in this position, or in that capacity, or in this or that role - - or whatever.
 - They do what they can where they are. They do not make it clear they want to be a pastor when it is just as evident they do not have the true gifting for shepherding OR teaching.
 - Faithful servants of God do not constantly say they have a vision to raise a mega-church when they struggle to get two people to attend their Bible study.
 - Faithful Christians do not assert they have the ‘gift of evangelism’ when all they do is shout verses and berate people at intersections and college campuses.
 - Faithful leaders do not round the corners and standards of God’s Word to achieve any kind of personal gain, personal benefit, or personal recognition.
 - I repeat: this point is very **simple**. If a ministry is trying to please oneself or others (rather than God), then it is not a TRUE ministry.
 - Others may be impressed, and others may be talking about it, and others may be praising it – but chances are good that **God is not IN it**. Such a ministry is missing the most important element.

NOTE: This point recalls the situation of the church in Laodicea (**Cf. Revelation 3:14-20**). In this passage, this historical church ALSO prophetically represents the greater church of the last days – just prior to the imminent Rapture.

That’s our timeframe! That’s our era! We better pay attention! This passage in **Revelation** is about the greater church of today – so what do we learn about it?

- a. It is wealthy by cultural and institutional standards – in fact it is ALL about Christian culture and institution - - but it is lukewarm, unpalatable to God, and totally useless.
- b. It considers itself independent, capable, successful, ‘on fire,’ and effective – but it is completely delusional, and it cannot be told otherwise. It does not see itself properly.
- c. It believes it has spiritual insight, and it thinks it knows how to regard Scripture and how to handle the ministry of God’s Word – but it is blind, destitute, and pitiful.
- d. (I could say a lot more things like these, but here’s the main point of them all): This is a picture of a church is infatuated with how it perceives itself and how it is perceived by others – **but God is not IN it**. A church like this is missing the most important element of all.

- e. In **Revelation 3:20**, we see Jesus speaking, and he says about this church, “*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*”
 - f. Here’s the bottom line: there are many ministries and many churches today which have fooled themselves into believing something about themselves which is not true.
 - g. Because they care so much about appealing to others, because they care so much about conforming to culture, because they care so much about earning the praises of men - - then it is not of God.
 - h. Jesus Christ, in fact, is not even IN it like He needs to be. **Revelation 3:20** is plain. He’s not a part of that church like it thinks He is. This is very sobering.
2. (I’ll close with a couple of comments about the last part of **verse 4**). Paul mentions God is the one who “*tests our hearts.*”
- Here – Paul is essentially invoking God as his witness to the integrity of their ministry’s motives. Why?
 - Because all our motives – including those we have in ministry – have their source in the heart.
 - That’s why Paul made it clear that their motive was to please God alone.
 - That’s why he confesses in earlier parts of **1 Thessalonians Ch. 2** that their message of the Gospel was not popular in the eyes of men.
 - It’s why Paul states that they dare not be unfaithful in the eyes of God.
 - When we present a message, conduct a ministry, or carry out a service to seek other people's favor, support, praise, recognition, or adulation - - then we lose God's approval in that process.
 - This is no longer a TRUE ministry, for HE sees our hearts and HE knows our motives.

NEXT WEEK: We continue in **1 Thessalonians Ch. 2** and this focus on the question, “What are the marks of a true ministry?” Things get a little more personal in **vss. 5-9**.



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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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