



THE MARKS OF A TRUE MINISTRY, PART 3

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Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- In **1 Thess. 2:1-12**, Paul lays out some criteria for distinguishing between a 'ministry' that is raised by man and a ministry that is raised by God.
- When we study the Bible, we learn a true ministry is never measured by conventional, cultural, or institutional standards.
- It's never supposed to be evaluated by programs, budgets, buildings, rituals, dollars, subscribers, and a host of other similar things.
- It is so easy to fall into a precarious deception here. It's so easy to elevate man's systems and values to near 'theological' status.
- It's tempting to equate some of our traditional ideas as being a ministry that God is **IN**. Yet – we read in **Rev. 3:20** that these very things often keep God **OUT**.
- Paul shows us in **1 Thess. 2:1-12** that the marks of a **true** ministry are often noted by the diverse challenges of 'faithfully enduring in one direction.' These things include:
 - Showing the results of labor and the value of changed lives (**vs. 1**),
 - Suffering, insults, and strong opposition (**vs. 2**),
 - Facing misunderstanding, and accusations of error and wrong motive (**vs. 3**), and....
 - Avoiding the temptation to please men rather than God (**vs. 4**).

NOTE: Today, in Part 3 of '**The Marks of a True Ministry**,' we will also learn a Godly ministry is recognized by the qualities of **true** service. This is found in **vss. 5-9 (READ!)**:

NOTE: From this passage, I've outlined **five** qualities of **true** service. These are virtues that Paul and his companions – Silas and Timothy – showed as they took care of this body of Thessalonian believers. They serve as key insights on the marks of a **true** ministry. They are:

- A. True service shows **integrity**
- B. True service shows **humility**
- C. True service shows **gentleness**
- D. True service shows **love**
- E. True service shows **focus**

A. True service shows integrity

NOTE: Paul begins **vs. 5** here with the words “*You know*” - - just as he did back in **2:1**. The things Paul is about to state are things others can see (and one of those important marks of a **true** ministry is **true** service – and key to THAT, is integrity).

1. I want you to focus on the word ‘*never*’ for a moment. Most translations use this word, and it’s an unforgiving standard.
 - Paul is putting his reputation on the line here. He’s essentially challenging folks to find just ONE time his claims here are not true.
 - This shows his **choice** to keep a certain standard. It’s been said that ‘integrity is doing what is right even when nobody is watching.’
2. Paul’s choices – in ministry – were to **never** do certain things. What were those things he **never** wanted anyone to see in him?
 - **Flattery – (Cf. Prov. 26:28):** “*a flattering mouth works ruin.*” It is all about self-interest. People flatter others for personal gain, and Paul was having no part of that.
 - He recognized that insincere speech, exaggerated praise, and ‘buttering up’ people were the ‘politics of business as usual’ – but they only contributed to a shaky foundation.
 - Really, the problem is deeper than the words which are used. The problem of flattery boils down to the motives of making a favorable impression that would gain influence over others for some sort of selfish advantage.
 - The early Christian churches were plagued with “people who attempted to cash in on their Christianity” (Barclay). We see the same problem rampant today.
 - I watched a pastor many years ago speak a certain way to prominent and successful people in his congregation differently than he spoke to the ‘nobody’s.’ He was flattering the first group for his personal goals and ambitions. It was so obvious.
 - Flattery is always associated with deception, and it is always indicative of bad or faulty character in the one who is flattering others.
 - A flatterer manipulates instead of properly communicating. “It corrupts both the receiver and the giver” (Edmund Burke).
3. Another aspect of Paul’s integrity was seen in something else he **never** did.
 - He never engaged in any **pretext for greed**. He never had to put up a ‘false front.’
 - He never had to wrestle with the dilemma of preaching and engaging in ministry to coerce whatever financial gain he could - - all while trying to hide this motive.

- This is one of the greatest problems in the modern church and in modern ministries today: this pathetic attempt to disguise or hide avaricious intent. Nobody is fooled! There is no integrity.
- From TV preachers to multiple dozens of so-called ‘prophets, evangelists, apostles,’ and so on - - there is a thinly veiled cloak over covetousness on their part. They are all about personal and material gain. It’s so obvious!
- The Greek word for ‘pretext’ here is *‘prophasis,’* and it is used in Scripture to throw up a deliberate disguise to conceal one’s true motive. It is sometimes translated as ‘pretense’ in our English Bibles.
- Jesus used it when talking of the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:14:**

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, even while for a **pretense** you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.”*

- This problem of hidden agendas, of people using ‘ministries’ of all sorts to promote themselves, and to address their own needs and wants (whether financial or emotional, or whatever) is a HUGE problem today.
- It is clearly NOT a mark of a **true** ministry. There is nothing that remotely smacks of **integrity** in this kind of picture. It’s why Paul is direct in claiming it’s not part of what he is doing.

B. True service shows humility

NOTE: This is seen in **vs. 6** where Paul specifies that he was *‘not looking for praise from men.’*

1. Again – this is a blunt assessment of a **true** ministry. Jesus came down hard on the Pharisees when he said in **John 12:43** that they *“loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”*
 - This is another major problem in the greater church today. As Henry Morris writes, *“This is an indictment of many modern professed evangelicals who often are so enamored of (receiving) acceptance and prestige among their peers that they will dilute Biblical standards of doctrine and practice to attain and keep their standing in the world.”*
 - Paul is not saying that he never received any honor from men – and he’s not saying that he had no right to receive it. That’s a different conversation.
 - What Paul **IS** saying is he was not seeking this kind of recognition from others as he engaged in ministry and preached the gospel.
 - In short, not only was Paul not motivated by greed and money, neither was he motivated by any desire for praise from men.
2. Paul did not have a ‘dog in the hunt’ named PRIDE here. He didn’t care what other people thought or what they said. He showed **humility** instead.

- Paul cared **only** what God thought of him - - and that's why he said in the verse just before, "*God is our witness.*" Paul's chief priority was being praised by God.
- **IMPORTANT:** Paul didn't seek any praise from men because his own needs for security and acceptance were met in Jesus Christ.
- This meant that he was totally freed from spending his life trying to gain approval and acceptance from others.
- He ministered from a healthy understanding of his identity in Jesus. When he talked to others – he visualized Jesus behind them.
- When he felt the distress and labor of ministry – he recalled what Jesus had done for him! (etc.)
- Paul was able to 'endure faithfully in one direction' because he had no pride or desire for personal attention tripping him up. He was saturated with **humility**.
- Authentic ministries – and the people that work in those ministries - do not seek personal praise or validation from other people.
- They do not expect or demand honor, nor do they seek any elevated status among others. That is not their motive. True service shows humility.

C. True service shows gentleness

NOTE: This is seen in the last half of **vs. 6** and going through **vs. 7**, and there are two concepts woven together here: 'gentleness' and 'care.'

1. Paul paints a picture here of a mother caring for her little children, and that's the way we need to look at this element of **true** service.
 - I know many of you – like me – were raised in a painful and dysfunctional family. You have limited understanding from your OWN past of this kind of 'gentleness' and 'care.' (I am sorry for that, and I understand that...)
 - But try to wrap your minds around the key point Paul is making here: Instead of ruling as a heavy-handed authoritarian figure or a dictator, Paul says **true** ministers are gentle and caring among their congregation - or among those they are serving in some way.
 - They act like a mother who tenderly cares for her own children. This is a critical assessment point of a **true** ministry or minister.
2. Here are a few quick comments about this aspect of 'gentleness' and 'care' that Paul introduces as a mark of a **true** ministry:
 - It's never a burden to those it is serving – Paul says '*we could have been a burden to you...*' BUT - - instead - - we were gentle.
 - Gentleness and care is never a burden to others. A domineering parent – someone who is oppressive in their words and actions – is always a great burden to a child. I know!

- A **true** ministry should be opposite of that. A **true** ministry should never be known by having authoritarian, oppressive, power-hungry, insecure, and 'my way or the highway' types of folks working in it.
- In my life, I've been part of several churches that had this despotic and authoritarian element within its leadership structure.
 - It never turned out well. It is always destructive - the same way that kind of dysfunctional parent can also impact their family. It is the opposite of 'gentle' and 'caring.'
 - Paul says the right kind of service is a 'gentle' and 'caring' kind: it is patient, it seeks others' welfare first, it doesn't mind being interrupted and inconvenienced, it makes itself available to others, it does all it can to serve and assist - - and it shows real CARE.
 - When a pastor says, "I'm not a shepherd" - - what they are really saying is "I have absolutely no business being in the position I'm in." A real shepherd is gentle; they 'care.'
 - One of the marks of a **true** ministry is displayed in gentleness and genuine care of its service to others.

D. True service shows love

NOTE: Various translations say 'fond affection,' 'love,' or 'deep care.' I'll deal with this issue broadly to capture the larger intent.

1. The meaning here is to desire, or to be affectionate of. The Greek term underneath our English translations expresses a longing for - - or loving very much.
 - It's not hard to see that Paul felt very close to these Thessalonian believers.
 - He deeply desired to be with them and to communicate his care OF them TO them. It continues the same vein of thought as a caring mother.
2. The genuineness of Paul's affection and love for these believers is seen in his statement, "*but our lives as well*" (**Cf. vs. 8b**). This kind of love – this kind of service - involves personal sacrifice.
 - You cannot really love somebody without giving up part of yourself in the process. Demonstrating this kind of deep care means letting go of a piece of you. Sacrifice is involved.
 - (And) Paul expresses his love by affirming his willingness to sacrifice. This is a consistent virtue of his that we see throughout his life of ministry:

Paul, in declaring himself and his intentions to the Ephesian elders, says in **Acts 20:24**, "*I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*"

(And he adds in 2 Corinthians 12:15) – “And I will most gladly spend and be expended (consumed) for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?”

- When you study the life of Paul and how he engaged in ministry, you can clearly see that his genuine love and affection was clear in all his activities.
- You can also see that this kind of care came with personal sacrifice - - and Paul was willing, and even eager to give up his own interests and desires (and even his own life) to carry out his service in **true** ministry.
- This is an exceptionally RARE quality in **ministries** and **ministers** today. I've maybe known of one or two people in my entire life that met this standard.

NOTE: In many churches today, the pastor preaches a surface-level 25-30 minute sermon; they take Mondays, Friday afternoons, and Saturdays off; they have a receptionist that screens their calls and filters their emails; they take a 3-6 month 'sabbatical' after being in the pulpit for only 2 years; they push for more generous personal benefits while claiming they 'are not a shepherd;' they don't want to lead a separate Bible study; and, they don't want to preside over memorial services. I've seen all this time and again....

- This is NO MORE a mark of a **true** ministry any more than it is an attribute of **true** service.
 - Most ministries today - and those that lead them - are far removed from these affirmations of **true** service, **true** love, and **true** sacrifice.
 - A **true** ministry gladly goes beyond merely dispensing information, or helps, or materials, or sermons - it involves sharing one's very life, and giving up those things which are personally significant.
3. Paul says in **vs. 8** (and I'm paraphrasing), "We were willing to give **ourselves** to you, to put ourselves at your disposal, without reservation - - even our lives if that is needed."
- When William Tyndale was being burned at the stake for his Bible translation work, he cried out, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."
 - Before Jim Elliott was martyred as a missionary to the Auca Indians, he wrote, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose."
 - I love my wife and my children. I would give up my life for them if I needed to. Many of you would do the same for yours.
 - This is the posture behind what Paul is saying. He genuinely loved those he was serving and ministering to - - and he was sacrificing his personal energies and interests for them.
 - He was even willing to give up his life for them if that was needed. And he ultimately did....he was beheaded by the Emperor Nero around 67AD.

E. True service shows focus

NOTE: This point leans a bit from on one we made several weeks ago. A **true** ministry is marked by hardship - - even severe oppression. It's part of fighting the **right** battles.

1. But Paul's point here is a subset of those things we learned earlier. Here, Paul is referring to a round-the-clock **focus**. He's referring to the work and labor that are always a part of that focus.
 - The key point Paul is making here is this: he's not going to let his personal matters get in the way of effective service.
 - He'll do whatever it takes to get the job done. He won't let his needs and issues interfere with the much greater priority of the Gospel.
 - It's hard work! You can see that clearly in what Paul specifically says. He tells his readers, "You remember how we conducted ourselves. It wasn't easy!"
2. I am reminded here in **vs. 9** - and in the example of Paul in other parts of Scripture – of the **difficulty** and **awareness** of keeping up this kind of **focus**.
 - In a very real way of thinking, Paul continues to build on the 'mother' analogy he used in **vs. 7**.
 - Dr. J. Vernon McGee, in his *'Through the Bible Commentary,'* says the following about this analogy:

*"Man's work is from sun to sun, but a mother's work is never done." A mother is not a paid nurse. Paul is saying that he wasn't a paid nurse who worked by the hour. He wasn't a hired baby-sitter. He did not belong to a union. Have you ever heard of a mothers' union which insisted a mother would work only for eight hours of the day? Have you known any mothers who punch the clock and then turn away from their crying babies because they refuse to work anymore? Mothers work a little differently—**night and day.**"*

- This is Paul's precise point here, and he calls out two Greek words which are rendered in our translations as 'labor' and 'hardship' – '*kopos*' and '*mochthos*.'
 - **Labor** (or *kopos*), literally means to chop, cut down, strike, and it even carries the idea of fatigue and sorrow.
 - It conveys arduous and wearying toil - involving sweat, fatigue, and weariness which accompanies the straining of all of one's powers to the utmost. It is the proper word for physical tiredness induced by work, exertion or heat.
 - *Mochthos* (or **hardship**) introduces the additional element of painfulness, suffering, and affliction. It is used to show the struggle to overcome difficulties.
- Paul's use of these two terms stresses the reality and exhausting character of his work and service as a missionary.
- He makes the point that his ministry and his service was not a pleasant, self-serving activity which he took on as an easy means of gaining a livelihood.

- He was **aware** of the limitations of the saints he was serving. They were giving to the cause of his ministry, but he *'did not want to be a burden,'* and so he worked around-the-clock to keep them from feeling the stresses he was facing.
- There is a sound Biblical principle at play here, and I challenge you to do a personal study on the great men and women in the Bible that were used mightily of God. It took work – lots of it! Hard work! Night and day work!

APPLICATIONS: We've concluded three weeks of studying 'The Marks of a TRUE Ministry.' I want to leave you with three simple things you should think about and apply in your own lives. These will make a BIG difference!

1. Start cultivating the ability to tell the difference between 'ministries' of man's design and **true** ministries of God's design. This applies to all kinds of outreaches and ministries – but be discerning!
 - Listen to and get behind those who exhibit genuine and self-sacrificial love.
 - Pray for those who 'endure faithfully in one direction.' Take the time to let them know you see what they are doing and you are supporting them before the Throne of God.
 - Beware of many of them who seem to make it about themselves, about their organization, or their church. God does not divide up his sovereign and unified plan.
2. Hear God's calling to **you** to start giving yourself away to people in need. Go invest your life in people for the sake of the Gospel.
 - Stop worrying about the things you are not going to take with you into your next life.
 - Invest into your REAL future. Start paying attention to the things that will earn you eternal rewards.
3. If you want to serve Christ, don't worry about starting a big organization or joining one. Instead, be a mother or father to someone – or to some people - who need that.
 - Start caring about the spiritual well-being of another person and love them around-the-clock.
 - Seek to advance God's perfect work in them as a good mother or father would do. Be selfless and caring.
 - Don't regard your obstacles and struggles in the process of doing what is right as any indication you may be doing something wrong.
 - Often, it is our greatest struggles that show God is doing His greatest work.

NEXT WEEK: Our lesson will be "What Does it Mean to be Blameless?" Paul makes the point he was 'blameless.' What is that all about - - and how can we be blameless too?



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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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