

# WHATEVER BECAME OF INTEGRITY?

By Ray C. Stedman

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Last week I was in Southern California, meeting with some thirty pastors from large churches all over the country. A new phenomenon in the church in America is the rise of the mega-church. A congregation of two or three thousand members is today regarded as just a moderate-sized body, although when I was a boy, a church of that size was considered enormous. Today, however, there are dozens of them. Among the churches that were represented were some that had congregations of ten thousand or more every Sunday. One had 3,500 people coming on Wednesday evening, most of them untouched pagans. It was exciting to learn how God is working in that church. There were many differences of temperament represented among the thirty pastors attending. There were old and young men, outgoing and retiring personalities. But one thing that came through clearly was that all of them had a deep concern for people. These men were real pastors and shepherds. Peter Drucker, an expert on business and management, offered some comments on approaches and organization. But the main emphasis of our discussions was how to minister to people.

We find a great model for ministry in the section of First Thessalonians to which we come now. The Apostle Paul was a master shepherd and we have evidence of this in his letters to the various churches, and especially in this first letter to a church which he had founded in the city of Thessalonica. In the first twelve verses of Chapter 2, we get a sense of his deep concern for the spiritual development of these believers. This paragraph provides a wonderful model for ministry. While there is no doubt that Paul is defending himself from some criticisms that had arisen after he had left Thessalonica -- obviously some people in the city were trying to accuse him of wrong motives for his ministry and he is answering that -- yet there emerges in this section a marvelous picture of how a good shepherd works.

But you may be asking, "How does this apply to me? Pastors are a special breed apart. Does Paul have anything to say to me?"

One of the young pastors at our meeting last week commented: "Jesus was so human nobody would believe he was God; but we pastors are so godlike nobody thinks we are human!" There is an element of truth in that.

But I remind you of something which we have talked about a lot at Peninsula Bible Church, and that is, every believer is in the ministry. We all have pastoral responsibilities. If you are a parent you have a little flock at home to whom you should minister. This passage will help you minister effectively. Some of you have friends with whom you meet at breakfast or lunch, some of you have a Bible class in your home. This passage teaches how to be effective in any ministry, how to touch and change people.

The first six verses reflect one of the primary qualities necessary in a good shepherd. Paul says:

**For you yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain, {1 Th 2:1 RSV}**

That is, his work had been effective. He had left a church there in Thessalonica, although his detractors were trying to suggest that he had wasted his time. Here is why his work was effective:

**but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. {1 Th 2:2 RSV}**

Courage! That is the first essential for helping somebody else.

Do you sometimes find it hard to bring up a subject that needs to be discussed? Some people are very sensitive. They do not like to be reminded of certain things. That is when courage is required.

Paul, of course, is here referring to physical courage. He really is understating the case when he says he was "shamefully treated," and that he had "suffered" in Philippi. Actually, this was one of the three times when he was beaten with thick rods and then thrown into prison, a Roman form of punishment. There, although he and Silas were thrust into stocks and held immobile, they began to sing praises unto God.

Furthermore, Paul had suffered insult and mockery by being stripped of his clothes in public by order of the magistrates in Philippi. His Roman citizenship had been ignored. Even when he was freed by an earthquake he was summarily ordered out of town by the authorities. Yet he went bravely on to Thessalonica knowing that the same thing would happen there.

You cannot read the life of Paul and fail to see the tremendous courage he demonstrated in his ministry. When a riot broke out in Ephesus he actually tried to face down a howling mob who were bent on his life. He had to be restrained by his friends to keep from sacrificing himself to the mob's fury.

Where did he get his courage? Some say that Paul was courageous by nature, that he would take on anything or anyone. But certain verses indicate that was not true. He was like you and me. When he came into Corinth and began to preach, he did so, in his own words, "with much fear and trembling," {cf, 1 Cor 2:3}. Corinth intimidated him. Some of you who want to reach out to your fellow-workers feel intimidated at times by the pagan atmosphere of your work-place. Paul felt that very strongly. In Ephesus, he wrote, "there were fightings without and fears within," {cf, 2 Cor 7:5}. No, Paul was not naturally courageous.

He was like most of us. By nature I am a devout coward. The few times in my life that I have shown courage were simply the grace of God at work.

In these next verses, Paul declares very clearly, both negatively and positively, what lay behind his courage.

**For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. {1 Th 2:3-6 RSV}**

Many people can appear to be courageous and bold, but for the wrong reasons. Paul lists his reasons here:

First, he says, he did not preach out of "error or uncleanness." In other words, he did not come peddling some particular private revelation. Today, we are confronted with a parade of gurus, prophets, seers, avatars and others, peddling their peculiar forms of doctrine. The Hare Krishnas confront you in airports; the Moonies, under the leadership of Sun Myung Moon, who claims to be the Messiah, boldly peddle their doctrine across the country and around the world. On the surface they appear to be bold and courageous. They seem to be driven by conviction -- and perhaps they are in some degree -- but it is wrong conviction. But Paul did not come to Thessalonica peddling any private doctrine. It was the truth of God, confirmed by the prophets and by Jesus Christ himself.

Nor did he come inviting people to sexual license, encouraging them to indulge themselves, to throw over all moral bonds and do whatever they liked. That is how some attract a big following today. Think of Jim Jones and what he did in San Francisco. The Bhagwan commune in Oregon indulged in sexual orgies and people flocked there, attracted by that kind of degenerate teaching. But this was never part of the apostle's doctrine.

Also guile, flattery, and greed played no part in his preaching. I appreciate his words along that line, when so many teachers on television today are appealing to our ego, to the macho instinct in us. Many of you have seen a certain fellow on television who wears a crazy hat, smokes a cigar, orders people around and demands that they send him money. He appears to be bold and uncompromising, but he manifests every indication of sheer ego and disguises it by an attempt to be a teacher of the Word. What he is teaching has a degree of truth to it, but it is mixed with a great deal of error. I can name people right around here who have succumbed to that kind of an appeal.

Others offer a promise of prosperity. If you follow them, they say, you will become rich. This was not Paul's doctrine, either. "We did not come with a cloak for greed," he says. What a true description that is of much that we hear on television today!

I have a friend in Houston, Texas, a brilliant businessman, who also happens to be a great Bible teacher. While preparing to teach his Sunday School class recently he wondered how he would relate to God if this "prosperity theology" were true. He jotted down some of his thoughts and put them in rhyme. Here is what he came up with, entitled *An Offer God Couldn't Refuse*:

You know, God, I've been thinking,  
and I hope that I'm not wrong  
I think I got it figured out  
how we can get along.

There's certain things You gotta have,  
and things that I need, too.  
So I got a proposition --  
tell ya what I'm gonna do!

I'm readin' in the paper here  
that things ain't goin' great,  
The dollar's down, the yen is up,  
and some of us can't wait  
To get the next edition of the "Journal"  
or the "Post",  
To see which market overseas,  
last night has fallen most.

Now certain friends have told me  
You got troubles with Your game,  
With Jimmie and with Tammy,  
and some others I won't name.  
And the things that I am hearing,  
and the word all over town,  
Is that your overhead is up,  
while income's coming down.

I don't mean no disrespect,  
I hope I don't sound brash,  
But with the praise and glory,  
I think You could use some cash!  
So, I got this little acreage in the  
Gulf of Mexico.  
I'm sure there's oil there somewhere,  
but just where I do not know.

So here's what You can do for me,  
within your sovereign will.  
Send a vision! Send a sign! Just show me  
where to drill!  
Then when the oil comes gushing in,  
(You ready for a laugh?)  
Some might offer ten percent--  
I'll cut You in for half!

But wait--It just occurred to me,  
this deal will be a mess.  
Where should I send Your money?  
I don't have Your home address!  
But no, I have the answer.  
And you'll like it I am sure.  
Do You remember how much dough  
the Pope spent on his tour?

It set the Cardinals sighing, and it made  
the Bishops groan.  
It cost about a million for a day in  
San Antone,  
And if that was the figure for a day of  
Papal drumming,  
We'd better lay the groundwork now  
for Jesus' Second Coming!

So I'll just keep your share, dear Lord,  
and it will be just fine.  
And 'til sweet Jesus needs it, Lord  
I'll just pretend it's mine!

That is pretty accurate theology, given what we see on television today. "A cloak for greed," is Paul's description of this type of appeal. He would have nothing to do with it. As we will see, he refused even to let the Thessalonians support him in any way, though later he received help from the Philippians. He came to Thessalonica intent on giving them something they desperately needed, and he supported himself until they had received it.

Finally, he says, still putting it negatively, he did not come to seek fame or status in the eyes of men. Verse 6: "nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." He could have played upon his position and authority as an authorized spokesman of Jesus, but he did not want anything for himself. He did not slant his message, slurring over some of the unpleasant aspects of the truth, to appeal to the popular mind. He was honest and faithful, and ministered to them truthfully, regardless of whether he received any praise, glory, or thanks. None of these motives lay behind his preaching, not error, uncleanness, guile, flattery, greed or ambition.

What did motivate him, then? What produced his kind of courage? We learn the answer in Verse 4: "Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts." That wonderful verse gives us two things that motivated Paul:

First, he is intensely grateful for the sheer honor of proclaiming the gospel, the good news about God. Four times in these verses (in 2, 4, 8 and 9) he makes mention of the gospel of God. He gloried in the fact that God had called him to deliver a message that people desperately needed.

Why do people suffer heartbreak, loneliness, misery and agony of spirit day in and day out throughout their lives? It is because they do not know the truth about God. They do not know the delivering power of Jesus Christ. They do not know the inner warmth, strength and encouragement that can come from Christ living in them. God has committed that message to Paul and to us that we might share it with them. What an honor that is! In all my years of preaching nothing has been more motivating and encouraging to me than to remind myself that I have already been given the greatest honor that can ever be given to a human being, to proclaim what Paul calls "the unsearchable riches of Christ," {Eph 3:8}. Could there be anything greater than that? That is how Paul felt, and it continually motivated him.

More than that, he says that he was energized by a desire to please God. Now, the only reason anyone has a desire to please God is because he has learned to love him. You never truly try to please God if you do not love God. You may try to please him to get something for yourself. Some have that as their motive. But if you want to really please God, if that is a strong, impelling force within you, it is because you have learned that God already loves you. That is why we sing so many hymns that speak about the love of God for us. Every Christian ought to look back continually to that fantastic deed when

"On Christ almighty vengeance fell,  
that would have sunk a world to hell.  
He bore it for a chosen race,  
and thus became our hiding place."

That is what drives us to want to please God.

This was always Jesus' motive. He said so himself, "I do always those things which please my Father," {cf, John 8:29}. It was not because he wanted something from God -- he could have had anything he wanted -- but because he loved him and so wanted to please him. Bold, blustery Peter felt this powerfully when he met with the Lord after the resurrection by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asked him three times that searching question, "Peter, do you love me?" {John 21:15-17}. All Peter could finally say was, "Lord, you know that I love you," {John 21:15-17}. That is what brought him back from the moment of his disobedience and weakness. He knew that he loved him, because Jesus had first loved him. That is truly the wellspring of courage. If you need courage, do not try to summon it up from within yourself. Begin to think about the love of God, about the honor of walking with him, and of speaking of the truth to others. Soon you will find yourself driven -- compelled, as Paul puts it in Second Corinthians, "the love of Christ compels me," {cf, 2 Cor 5:14 NIV}. That is the secret of his courageous activity.

A second quality of a good shepherd is found in Verses 7-9.

**But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.**

**For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. {1 Th 2:7-9 RSV}**

That can only be described as sensitive love, a love deeply desirous of blessing someone and finding gentle, tender ways of communicating that. Perhaps the first need in loving is to learn to do it gently. Love often has to be strong and tough. It must sometimes rebuke, but it has to learn how to do so gently. That is what Paul did. He came among them as a nursing mother feeding her children, delighted to minister to their need.

When I was a young Christian, I came under the ministry of Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators. Dawson was a strong personality. He could be demanding. He was self-disciplined to an enormous degree, and he expected self-discipline of those who worked with him. That is a mark of the Navigators yet today, wherever they minister. But when I met alone with Dawson, he always was gentle. He always spoke directly to me, and seemed aware of my need, and my capacity. I often thought of him as being like the Apostle Paul. Paul could be stern and sharp, but when he was with someone alone, he was gentle. That is a mark of a true shepherd.

There is a second manifestation of a loving spirit in the words, "being affectionately desirous of you." That is an unusual phrase, not often found in Scripture. Literally, it means "a yearning, a longing for you." I sometimes feel this myself especially when I am talking to a young person. I feel my heart longing to help them, to bless them, to teach them, to lead them, to fulfill them. That is how parents feel about their children. There is a yearning after them, an affectionate desire to see them blossom and go in the right direction. That is characteristic of those who seek to minister to others.

A third mark of a loving spirit is found in Verse 9: "you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you." Hard work! That is a sign of a true shepherd, a true pastor.

Every Jewish boy had to learn a trade, and Paul's trade was tentmaking. Rather than take offerings from his new converts, he worked long hours into the night making tents. Perhaps, as they listened to him teaching and instructing them during the daytime, these Thessalonians noticed that Paul's hands were not the cultured, soft hands of a rich man who had never worked. They were, rather, the horny hands of a laborer who worked hard at his trade, and they knew it was in order that he might bless them, and not be a burden on them.

My wife thinks her hands are ugly because they are not as smooth and soft as they once were. I can say that none of the creams and lotions advertised today live up to their promises! But, to me, her hands are beautiful because they represent self-sacrificing labor. Long hours doing dishes and mopping floors are hard on hands, but that is a manifestation of a loving heart.

Faithfulness is the third, and most important, mark of a good shepherd. We find mention of it in Verses 10-12:

**You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. {1 Th 2:10-12 RSV}**

The modern term, *integrity*, accurately expresses this. Integrity is in short supply in Christian circles today, especially in the electronic church, where some leaders' lives are a mess, yet they are allegedly seeking to try and help others. It never can be done. But hear Paul. "We were holy and righteous and blameless," he says. Holiness means "separate, intended for a single purpose." In this sense, *singleminded* would be a good translation. The Old Testament speaks of "the beauty of holiness" {1 Chr 16:29, 2 Chr 20:21, Psa 29:2, 96:9}, of someone who knows who he belongs to and is satisfied. Many think Paul was an egotist, a boaster who claimed things he had no right to claim. But whenever he speaks of his own holiness, he makes clear that he is not responsible for it. It is the grace of God at work in him.

Also he was righteous before others. He behaved himself, resisting things which could be misconstrued or which would tend to mislead. In Corinthians he wrote that if his drinking wine or eating meat offended, he would not touch either again, {cf, 1 Cor 8:13}. He was righteous in his public behavior.

Finally, he was blameless in his own eyes. Do not misunderstand that. Blamelessness in Scripture never means sinlessness. Paul did not think of himself as sinless. What he means is: He is honest. He has dealt with all his sin. Aware of it, he judges it and does something about it. He does not cover it over because he knows, as he puts it, "God tests the heart." God knows what is going on inside so Paul is strictly honest with himself, does not deceive himself, but confesses his wrong and so is blameless.

In Southern California last week we met in small groups to discuss and share with one another how we pastors kept ourselves vital and spiritually alive. One of the pastors I met with particularly intrigued me. This man is only 35 years old, but he ministers to more than ten thousand people every Sunday morning. I was interested in what he said about how he maintains his spiritual capacity:

Every morning he sits at his desk and writes across the top of a sheet of paper the letters A, C, T, S. (I pass this on for any help it may give any of you.) The A stands for adoration; C, confession; T, thanksgiving; and S, supplication.

Under the letter A, he writes down all the things he can think of about the majesty, greatness and glory of God. He does what Jesus teaches us to do in the Lord's prayer, which is to turn our thoughts to God first: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," {Matt 6:9, Luke 11:2}. Then he begins to contemplate the majesty of God, the greatness of his being, the love of his heart, the mercy that he has manifested toward him, and he lists all those qualities. That is what the Psalmist did: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. All that is within me, bless ye the Lord," {cf, Psa 103:1-2}.

Then he turns to confession. He said, "I write down the sins that I am aware of doing yesterday. If it is Monday morning, and, in my preaching Sunday, I exaggerated in an illustration -- I said it was a nine car pile-up when it was only a six car pile-up -- I do not write that I exaggerated, but that I lied to the people. If I inadvertently kept some change that was given to me by mistake, I do not write down that I kept some money that was not mine, but that I stole some money yesterday. I want to be hard on myself. I want to put it down in the worse possible way so I will face in myself these tendencies."

Next, he said, "I turn to thanksgiving, and I begin to give thanks that I am forgiven these things. One by one I cross them out, and write, 'forgiven, forgiven.'"

Then under supplication, I pray and ask God for the strength not to be like that anymore, but to be honest, careful and thoughtful."

No wonder that young man is being greatly used of God!

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My heart delighted that such a young preacher would have that kind of integrity about him.

That is what we see here in Paul. He is honest, thoroughly, ruthlessly honest.

From that base of a faithful personal life, the apostle does three things for the Thessalonians: He exhorts them, he encourages them, and he challenges them.

Exhortation usually takes the form of a rebuke. As I look back to when my children were growing up there were times when I had to sit down with them and say, "You are headed for trouble. If you go down the path you are traveling now, you are going to hurt yourself and your family. You are going to destroy things of value in your life." A father has to do that. So does a pastor, at times. And so will you, if you want to minister to someone's needs.

But, along with that, there should be encouragement and challenge. I have to confess, as I look back on my relationships with my children, there was not enough of that. Encouragement says, "You are doing better. I can see changes. You are going to make it. I am with you. Keep on." Encouragement is pointing out the positive values of things.

I have to confess with sadness there was often all too little also of challenge, of saying to them, "You are meant for better things. You do not have to live like this. There are great possibilities before you. God is leading you, and calling you, and urging you to lay hold of those."

That is what Paul does here, pointing out that it is God who calls us into his own kingdom and glory.

These are surely the "times that try men's souls." We are facing times of great danger and crisis. But these are also times of great possibilities. What a challenge to live today as Paul lived and ministered in his day!

As I look through this record and see these three marks of a faithful shepherd, courage, a loving, gentle heart, and a faithful spirit, I have to pray, and I hope you, too, are praying: "Lord, do this in my life. Make me a blessing in my own time."

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