



D. Todd Cravens  
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# Walk In A Manner Worthy of God

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

**Sermon Series:** *Thessalonians*

**Topic:** Christian Living



## 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup> But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. <sup>3</sup> For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, <sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. <sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. <sup>7</sup>

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.<sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.<sup>11</sup> For you know how, like a father with his children,<sup>12</sup> we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

## Introduction

Last week we began considering together Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In the first paragraph, Paul laid out his primary concern. We see it in verse 4.

1 Thessalonians 1:4

For we know, brothers [and sisters] loved by God, that he has chosen you...

Paul is intent from the beginning to remind the Thessalonian believers that they are both loved and chosen by God. Through the rest of the paragraph, he then moves on to offer multiple reasons why he knows that God loves and has chosen them, culminating in the fact that their lives were transformed. Paul knows God has chosen them because he granted them repentance<sup>1</sup> and they "turned away from idols to serve the true and living God and to wait for Jesus to return from heaven" (1:9-10).

In chapter two, Paul continues the same line of thinking, but this time instead of looking for evidence in the lives of the believers themselves, he turns to evidence within the lives of himself, Silas, and Timothy. He reminds them of their behavior before them and their conduct as they stayed with them. The next two paragraphs then move toward one exhortation. In these first twelve verses of chapter 2, there is only one imperative.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 (ESV)

...to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into this own kingdom and glory.

The point Paul is making is this, "*we know that God loves you and has chosen you* (1:4), *therefore walk in a manner worthy of this God who has called you into his glorious kingdom* (2:12)." This is the main point, **to live life in a manner worthy of God**. In other words, since the great and gracious God of the universe loves you, has chosen you, and has called you into his glorious kingdom, then let your manner of living reflect the true value of his love and election of you. Live according to his love for you. Since God loves you, you therefore should

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<sup>1</sup> Repentance is a gift from God. See 2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 5:31.

love him in return by ordering your life rightly. You ought to demonstrate your love of Him by living your life in obedience to his commands. Remember what Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15 ESV). Since you are now citizens of his glorious, heavenly kingdom, then you ought to live everyday in accordance with the rules, principles, and laws of His glorious, eternal kingdom here and now and not according to the rules of this fading, earthly kingdom.

## What Does Living a Life "Worthy of God" Look Like?

And what would that kind of life look like? What does "walking in a manner worthy of God" look like? What would a life look like that demonstrates the worth and worship of a God who loves unlovely people and chooses rejected sinners? What characteristics would mark such a life? From these first twelve verses, we can note three markers of a manner of life that is worthy of God.

## The Presence of God is Sweeter Than the Absence of Suffering (v. 2)

The first marker of a manner of life lived worthy of God is one that manifests the truth that *experiencing the presence of God is sweeter than the absence of suffering*. Paul takes the Thessalonians back in time to the events that took place in Phillipi immediately prior to his visit to Thessalonica. He reminds them of what happened in Phillipi and in their own city when Paul and Silas and Timothy began preaching.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 (ESV)

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup> But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

### Suffering in Phillipi

The events that unfolded in Phillipi are described in Acts 16. It was there that Paul met Lydia, a wealthy woman, who became the first believer in the city. Paul and Silas then meet a demon-possessed slave girl who earned her much money through fortune-telling.<sup>2</sup> Paul cast the demon out of the girl and when her owners realized that they had lost their means of income, they were furious. They dragged them before the city rulers and falsely accused them of sedition. Paul and Silas were publicly humiliated, stripped, beaten with rods, and then thrown in prison.<sup>3</sup> That night the jailer became a believer in Jesus, and mostly likely, so did the majority of the prisoners. After their release from prison, they departed Phillipi and travelled 100 miles southwest along the Egnatian Way down to Thessalonica.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 16:16.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 16:19-24.

## Suffering in Thessalonica

In Thessalonica there was an initial welcome. Paul was allowed, for three Sabbath days, to participate in the Synagogue worship and “to reason with them from the Scriptures” and explain the necessity of Christ’s death and resurrection and that Jesus was the messiah.<sup>4</sup> This lead to some of the Jews to become believers, along with many Greeks and “not a few leading women.”<sup>5</sup> After three weeks speaking the synagogue the non-believing Jews had enough of Paul’s teaching and so they kicked him out of the synagogue. So, Paul then turned to work and minister among the Gentiles. Many Gentiles became believers. But soon the non-believing Jews became jealous of Paul’s growing ministry and so they provoked some wicked men to form a mob stir up the whole city against them. They searched for Paul, but couldn’t find him. So they attacked some of the new believers and charged them all falsely with sedition. Paul and Silas had to escape the city by night. Thus, in verses 1 and 2, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the physical suffering and public shame they endured at Phillipi, as well as the conflict they experienced while preaching the gospel in Thessalonica. But he also reminds them that despite the suffering, shame, and conflict, they still ***boldly*** shared the gospel. This is what it looks like to walk in a manner worthy of God and his glorious kingdom.

You might think, after being publicly stripped, beaten with rods, openly shamed, and thrown in prison for the preaching the gospel of Jesus, that one would stay quiet about Jesus and opt for a more peaceful life. This, Paul and Silas did not do. You might also think that after being so treated in one city, and then banished, that when you experienced pretty much the same response, albeit slightly delayed, in the next city, that the trend would cause you to be silent about Jesus and rejoice in the lack of conflict. This, Paul and Silas did not do. Instead,

1 Thessalonians 2:2

“...we had ***boldness in our God*** to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.”

Paul says, “we had boldness ***in our God*** to declare to you the gospel...” I understand that to mean that Paul had so experienced God, that he had discovered that ***being in God was far better than being out of suffering***. Paul had so tasted the sweetness of knowing God that he now preferred obeying God over avoiding suffering. Something great and glorious had swept into Paul’s world. Something sweet and satisfying had been revealed to him. And it was so sweet and so satisfying that Paul was prepared to patiently endure suffering, if he had to, in order to share that sweetness and satisfaction with strangers in every town to which he would go. Being in God was better than being out of prison. Being in God was far better than being out of physical pain. Being in God was sweeter than being out of public shame. Being in conflict among men because of being in God was better than being in peace among men because of being out of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 17:2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:4.

A life that demonstrates the worth of God is one that has tasted and knows that the eternal joys that God has planned for those whom he calls into his glorious kingdom are supremely sweeter than all the combined pleasures this temporary world has to offer.

Which is preferable, temporal pleasures or eternal ones?

What would you rather have, \$10,000 per week now for 80 years or \$1,000 per week later for an infinite number of years? The answer is obvious. An infinite number of lesser payments is incomparably more than a limited number of more payments. Suffering that we may endure now for the sake of Christ, will not seem so great once have been welcomed into the glorious kingdom of God for all eternity. Paul and Silas knew this and that is why they were bold. Being in God is far better than being in the world.

The gospel of God, the good news of God, is so much better than the good news of this world that Paul and Silas were **bold** in the face of conflict and suffering in order to share the gospel with people who had never heard it before. They were willing to suffer for the sake of the salvation of others. *The worth of God was demonstrated in their preference to obeying God at the cost of suffering in their own flesh.* Walking in manner worthy of God means treasuring the proclamation of the gospel more than one's own personal safety and physical well-being.

Job is the clearest example of this. Job loved God more than his own health. Satan afflicted Job with painful boils from head to toe in hopes that Job would abandon his faith in God and curse God. Job did neither. He held onto his faith in God and he did not curse God. Job loved God more than his own health, more than his own body. Job loved God more than his own life. So did Paul. So did Jesus. Jesus gave up his life out of loving obedience to the will of his Father. Jesus offered his own body on the cross. Jesus loved being in God more than being out of pain.

We should each ask ourselves the question, "Is my life demonstrating the worth of God?" When my closest friends look at my life, do they see me living my life in a manner worthy of this great and glorious God who loved me and chose me and called me into his glorious kingdom?

If yes, then praise the Lord. If no, then repent and put it right. Ask the Lord to forgive you and pour out His Holy Spirit within you, in fullness, so that your life is transformed.

## Living to Please God from the Heart (v.4)

A second way that our lives can demonstrate the worth of God is by *living to please him from the heart*. You can't fake God out about what is truly going on in your heart. You can do all the right things and say all the right things, and fake out all the people around you, but you cannot deceive God. You can look like a servant of God on the outside and still have within you a heart that truly wants nothing to do with God. Walking in a manner worthy of God

means that truly, down deep in your heart, you delight to obey your Father who loves you and has chosen you.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-6 (ESV)

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,<sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.<sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.<sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,

In these verses, Paul reveals his heart. He is explaining the he, Silas, and Timothy did not come to Thessalonica preaching the gospel out of error, impurity, or an attempt to deceive or flatter, or as a means of gaining wealth or fame. It is likely that those in the city who had previously opposed Paul were saying these kinds of things about them in order to discredit them in the eyes of their fellow townsmen. Paul explains that this is not the case and he gets straight to the heart, in verse 4.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-6 (ESV)

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,<sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but **to please God who tests our hearts.**<sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.<sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,

God knows the heart and tests it, says Paul. He explains that they came preaching the gospel because it is **true**, and contains no error at all. The facts of the gospel are objectively truth whether any human or angel believe them to be true or not. The truth of the gospel stands even if every human heart errs from it. Paul, Silas, and Timothy came preaching out of a pure desire to explain the truth, **not deceive** them with lies.

Paul came preaching the gospel, not because of his own desire to preach, but because he had been **approved by God and entrusted** to preach the gospel. Paul did not chose to be a preacher, rather God chose him and then appointed him to go preach the gospel of Jesus where it had not been preached before. “**And so we speak**,” said Paul, “**not to please man, but God...**” Paul was not traveling the world preaching the gospel because ever since he was a little boy he’d always wanted to grow up and be an abused, mistreated, beaten, shamed, persecuted, and frequently banished traveling missionary. He didn’t grow up saying, “I want to preach and suffer for Jesus when I grow up.” Jesus had called him to this mission and thus he preached first and foremost out of obedience to God. He preached to please God, not to please man. He preached because God told him to preach, not because he wanted to be a Christian rock star.

Paul didn't arrive in Thessalonica preaching the gospel with flattering words, deceptive stories, and taking up a "love offering" every time he spoke. Paul says to them in verse 5, "**you know** this." In fact,

*You know*, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain (v.1).

...we were shamefully treated in Phillipi, as *you know*... (v.2)

We never came with words of flattery, as *you know*... (v.5)

*You remember*, our labor and toil... (v.9)

*You are witnesses*... how holy, righteous, blameless was our conduct toward you... (v.10)

*You know*... we were like a father with his children among you... (v.11)

Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of their experience of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. They saw how they lived, they listened to their words, and they witnessed their conduct. He reminded them they didn't preach seeking money. In fact, they never even asked for money nor apparently did they take any. But rather, as he notes in v.9, "...*we worked night and day so that we would not be a burden on any of you while we preached.*" Paul was not preaching for gain of wealth or the glory of men, but rather he preached to *please God*. "God is witness" (v.5), meaning, "God knows our hearts." He has seen what lies within us, because "**God tests our hearts.**"

God is not merely aware of the state of our hearts, but he examines them so that their genuine state will be seen. God is actively discerning the inner state our souls by putting us through certain experiences and tests that will reveal that which is unseen. The pastor under which I grew up would often say, "You never know what's in a bucket until it's bumped." When the contents slosh up and out over the rim, then you know what's inside. When the sudden test comes into your life, what sloshes out of your heart?

When the pop-quiz is sprung, whether or not you've been studying will be revealed. When the unexpected happens, and your bucket is bumped, what pop's out of your mouth? That will reveal what's in your heart. When difficulty occurs and hardship happens, then the contents of the heart are revealed. God tests the hearts of his children to help them understand what is inside them, which we can't see. *The test is for our benefit, not his.* God does not test the hearts of his children because He does not know what lies within our hearts. He knows our thoughts before we think them and our words before we speak them.<sup>6</sup> He tests our hearts because **we** do not know what is within our hearts. When the heat comes, what melts out of your heart? When the coronavirus hits, what happens in your heart? Is there peace,

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:2, 4.

confidence, rest, and trust in God's sovereignty, his power, and his provision? Or is there internal battle, anxiety, turmoil, distress, fear and anger that you are not in control and blame against God for making life to be difficult? God tests the heart. What has the test of the past two months revealed about your heart? What the test of this past week revealed about your heart? What did the test of last night reveal about your heart?

If you want to walk in a manner worthy of God, then take a look at your heart and see what the tests of late have revealed? Is there some disinfecting or cleansing that needs to happen in your heart? For the past week I've been recaulking a shower in our home. Ten years ago, the shower caulk was white and clean and shiny. But over time it has grown dark and dim and dingy. Black spots begin to grow in it. And it begins to look very badly. To add new caulk means you have to clean out the old. Talking out the old caulk is unpleasant and painful. You have to scrape and pull and peel. Sometimes it breaks. The old caulk fights to remain in place. It's comfortable where it is. It does not want to be disturbed. But if you want clean and new caulk, you can't leave any of the old caulk. It all must be scraped away in order to make way for the new.

The sins of the old life cannot be retained, if you want your life to shine for the glory of God. We cannot allow them to remain in place. Living a life that is worthy of the great and gracious God who loves you and has chosen you means opening your heart up the God who already knows your heart. If there is a portion of your heart that needs to be cleansed and disinfected, then invite him in to do some sanitizing, deep cleaning, and purifying. The deadly virus of sin has infected us all. And just as the black, moldy caulk pops up in our showers, so sin pops up in our hearts.

When the buckets of our hearts are bumped, sometimes what sloshes out needs to be cleaned up. And Jesus would come to us like a servant and say to us, just as he said to Peter, "*If I don't wash your feet, then you have no part in me.*" The process of sanctification is not optional for the Christian. We must surrender to Jesus and allow His Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Walking in a way that is worthy of our great God means allowing Jesus in to cleanse your heart. God tests the heart, not because he's unaware of its contents, but because he aims to purify us so that he may use us to boldly and effectively spread the hope of the gospel to people who are lost and have no hope.

## Affectionate Love for God's People (v.8)

Finally, a third way of living your life in a manner worthy of the great and gracious God who loves you and calls you into his glorious kingdom is by *affectionately loving the people whom He loves*. Paul said it in the beginning, "brothers and sisters, you are loved by God..." Thus, to walk worthily of God is to affectionately love the people who he loves.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 (ESV)

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own 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.

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 (ESV)

For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you...

Paul writes to the Thessalonians and reminds that of how gentle he, Silas, and Timothy were among them. He said, "*We cared for you like a nursing mother cares for her children.*" We were tender and gentle among you. This is likely the most affectionate image one can think of. What is more loving and nurturing than a mother nursing her own children? Can any image more gentle than that be conceived of? And Paul says, that's what we were like with you.

Why? Because we were so "*affectionately desirous of you.*" He means to say that they grew to love them. He loved them in sharing the gospel with them, but much more than that, they loved them enough that they "*shared our own selves also, because you were very dear to us.*" We not only gave you information, we gave you "*our own selves.*"

The Greek word translated by the word 'selves,' can also be translated 'lives' (NIV) or 'souls' (KJV, YLT). Paul is saying that they so affectionately loved these Thessalonians that, not only did they share the gospel-good news about Jesus, but they also shared their lives—their very souls—with them. These were much more than mere acquaintances with Paul. Paul loved them. Paul, Silas, and Timothy gave of themselves to the Thessalonians, just as a mother gives of herself, her milk, to her children, so Paul says, 'we shared our souls with you.'

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were like spiritual parents to this church. They were like a mother nursing her children and loving father exhorting and encouraging them. Paul is grasping for every metaphor he can to describe his love for them. And this is not mere force of will, it was true affection. They "*affectionately delirious*" of them and "*very dear.*"

The manner of life that is worthy of God is a life lived in love towards God's people. We must love one another. And this is needed now more than ever. We cannot allow any petty differences to divide us. We, as Peter commands, must "*love one another earnestly from the heart*" (1 Peter 1:22). I suspect we all have room to grow in this area.

And this is an area in which we all must grow. If we don't then we run the risk of demonstrating that we are not truly a child of God. John says that our love for fellow Christians is one of the means by which we know whether or not we are truly saved.

1 John 3:14 (ESV)

We know that we have passed out of death and into life, because we love the brothers.

By 'brothers' he means fellow believers. If you love your fellow Christians just as if they are your spiritual family, then you can know that you have "passed out of death and into life." If you do not love your fellow Christians, then you cannot have that certainty.

Living and walking in a manner worthy of God is loving the people of God. You can't claim to love God if you don't also love his people. Paul teaches us that loving God's people not only means sharing the gospel, but it also includes genuine affection and sharing our souls with one another. We called, as Christians, in one spiritual family, to move beyond mere surface level chit-chat. If God shares his soul with us, by giving his Spirit to us, then we too ought to do the same with one another.

## Conclusion

So, what shall we say in conclusion? Church, God loves you and has chosen you. Therefore, because of this great love and grace that has been shown to us, we ought to walk in a manner worthy of this great God.

We can do that by loving God and his gospel of salvation through Jesus more than we love our own personal comfort. Magnifying the worth of God through Jesus means we love our Lord more than we love a life free from conflict and suffering. Magnifying the worth of God means that we have so tasted the goodness and sweetness of knowing Christ that we will go to great lengths and personal expense in order to share this joy with those who don't know him.

Second, manifesting the worth of God in our lives means living our lives in honesty with God from the heart. God tests our hearts. He does so for our information, not his. He already knows what lies within us, but we do not. Therefore, he so governs the circumstances of our hearts as to expose to us the true state of our hearts. He reveals our motivations to us. If we want our lives to manifest the worth of God, then we must do diligent work in our own hearts to root out the sin that remains and replace it with the purity of goodness that comes from the help of the Holy Spirit.

Third, living life in a manner worthy of God means affectionately loving the people of God. We must genuinely love each other from the heart. We must share our souls with each other. We need to move beyond surface level interactions with one another and aim at a depth of love that is deep and genuine.

In all you do, let your manner of life be worthy of the great God and Savior who loved us and died for us.