



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Servant Leadership (1 Thess 2)

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BIBLE STUDY

Location:
123 CAP

Times:
2ND TUESDAYS
MONTHLY @ NOON

Tuesday, 11 October 2011
First Thessalonians 2:1-20 – “Servant Leadership”

Introduction

The previous Bible studies provided us with God’s Word relating to the topic of exemplary behavior, and how this is related to greatness and success. If the life of a Christian is to be described as exemplary, it is almost certainly because he/she had an exemplary mentor, who served him/her sacrificially and modeled a godly example. Scripture employs the similes of motherhood (2:6-9) and fatherhood (2:10-12) to describe this servant leadership. Moreover, those who are called to spiritual leadership (cf. Eph 4:11-12) will be faithful to Scripture (2:13-16) and demonstrate concern for those they serve (2:17–3:13). The majority of those who reject the revelation of God demonstrate their rebellion by living hedonistic, self-centered lives. The prevalent philosophy among those who are perishing is “take care of number one.” Only by God’s grace—through faith—can you and I develop the qualities of a servant leader described in 1 Thessalonians 2 (*but it is not only for our benefit, but also for the benefit of others, and most importantly, for the glory of God*).

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU (2:1-6)?

Chapter 2 begins with the mention that the Apostle Paul and his fellow missionaries “suffered” and were “mistreated” for proclaiming the gospel message. One does not exploit others if he/she is likely to suffer or be mistreated. The point being made is that a true servant leader has pure motives for those he/she leads. God is identified as helping these servant leaders to be bold with regard to the truth in spite of “much opposition.” God is the motivator for servant leadership (vv. 1-2).

Just as there are elected officials and others serving in the government arena who mislead individuals to gain a following, there were those in the ancient world who did the same. Scripture is clear that those who speak “from error or impurity or by way of deceit” (v. 3) are not motivated by God or the pursuit of His glory. Servant

leaders do not communicate error, which would be proclaiming as truth something that does not correspond to Scripture. Error is destructive because it can be fatal to an individual’s mind, with regard to God and His will for humanity, which would result ultimately in a destructive and perverse manner of living.

The word used for error indicates self-deception, which means these individuals actually believe their own error. Certainly, we can discern the absolute necessity to know (understand) and live God’s Word. Sexual immorality is indicative of those who have impure motives (see, for example, 2 Pet 2:13-14). The climax of “error” and “impurity” is the “way of deceit.” Having refused such wrong motivations, servant leaders seek to please God, who examines the heart, and do not “seek glory” from others (1 Thess 2:4-6).

WHAT CONCERNS YOU (2:7-12)?

Servant leaders have concern for others, which is demonstrated by being gentle as a mother (vv. 7-9) and nurturing as a father (vv. 10-12). One characteristic of a good mother is to be patient with children, which makes them gentle when others may be tempted to use force. *In terms of practicality*, this means that servant leaders are patient with people to allow them time to respond and eventually to change their actions. Servant leadership is sacrificial (v. 8), and suggests unreserved giving to help others.

The simile of a father emphasizes the idea of nurture. Three participles indicate this nurturing: “exhorting and encouraging and imploring” (v. 11). Exhorting is an appeal to do what is right by example. Encouraging is an appeal to comfort in times of discouragement or failure. Imploring is an appeal to emphasize the gravity of a situation to do what is right. Godly, servant leaders will exhort others to obey what God requires as revealed in Scripture; they will encourage other believers by reminding them of their spiritual resources; and, they will implore others with regard to their solemn responsibilities before God.

WHAT AFFECTS YOU (2:13-20)?

Verses 13-16 stress Scriptures’ effectiveness among believers as a consequence of a servant leader’s pure motives and concern. *The priority upon Scripture is because it is divine revelation; it is not some personal philosophy but the very “word of God.”* The effectiveness of God’s Word is to perform “its work in you who believe” (v. 13). The evidence of “its work” is a transformed life, which sometimes results in resentment from those who live and think contrary to Scripture (vv. 14-16; cf. Rom 11:25; 1 Pet 4:4).

Verses 19-20 reflect the affections of a servant leader. The wellbeing of those we lead is the first priority of the servant leader.

Paul communicated his affection for those he shepherded when he referred to other believers as his “hope or joy or crown of exultation” (v. 19). The Apostle demonstrated emphatically the great priority of the spiritual wellbeing of the church “in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming.”

Paul expressed his desire to visit the church at Thessalonica but was hindered by Satan (vv. 17-18). Even though a physical visit was not possible, Paul was concerned for the believers. He was “more eager with great desire to see [their] face,” and therefore longed for the presence of the Lord Jesus when a joyous face-to-face meeting would occur. At the second coming of Christ, the Thessalonian believers would be his “crown of exultation” before the Lord Jesus. Truly, verses 19-20 indicate that *being a blessing to others for the Lord’s glory should be the priority of life*. The coming of the Lord is to be a significant factor in our affections toward others (cf. 3:13).

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF REWARDS

Scripture reveals various crowns that will be given to believers, which appear to be based upon service to the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19, the focus is a “crown of exultation,” which is perhaps a crown received for faithfulness in evangelism and discipleship (given the context of Paul’s words to the Thessalonian church). Other passages of Scripture may confirm this understanding. For instance, 1 Corinthians 9:25 reads, “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.” The teaching is that the believer who lives a disciplined life will receive an imperishable crown. God’s Word alluded to the Isthmian games wherein athletes would discipline themselves to receive a perishable reward, but Scripture reveals that those who are disciplined unto the Lord receive an incorruptible, imperishable crown.

Second Timothy 4:8 reads, “in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” Apparently, this crown will be given to those who anticipate the Lord’s return, that is, yearn for his appearing.

Revelation 2:10 refers to another reward: the crown of life, which would be granted to those believers who endure trials, such as suffering a martyr’s death. First Peter 5:4 reveals, “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” The reference to the crown of glory should be understood as a reward given to those who shepherd God’s flock faithfully.

Scripture clearly reveals several different crowns that will be granted to believers. Some may say piously that these rewards do not matter, and the only significance is to experience eternity with Jesus Christ. Scripture, of course, responds to these sentiments in 1 Corinthians 9 wherein believers are commanded, “Run in such a way that you may win” (v. 24). Paul said that such rewards are important and stated that he ran “in such a way, as not without aim” (v. 26). He made such sentiments by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, all Christians should adopt the same conclusion that these crowns are important.

Consequently, the Word of God reveals different crowns granted to believers for faithfulness, and that those crowns will be given at what Scripture terms the judgment seat of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10, for instance, states “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” The Greek word for “judgment seat” is *bēma*. In the ancient world, the *bēma* was an elevated platform whereupon a judge would be seated to evaluate and reward contestants in the Greek athletic games for their performance. When Paul said he disciplined himself so that he would “not be disqualified” (v. 27), he was not indicating the unlikely possibility that he would lose his salvation. He was stating an analogy to the Christian life because in the Grecian games an athlete could be disqualified for not competing according to the rules, and therefore would not receive a reward. Paul was stating that he did not want to be disqualified for receiving a reward at the judgment seat of Christ. He was storing for himself “treasures [rewards] in heaven” (Matt 6:20), which is reason for Paul’s declaration that he would live in such a manner as to obtain “the prize” (1 Cor 9:24). Scripture is not revealing that eternal life is the focus of judgment; rather, at the judgment seat of Christ, the Christian is judged in terms of the opportunities and privileges received in Christ Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Paul referred to the believers at Thessalonica as a crown of glory to him. His sentiment is understandable because the glory of a mentor/teacher is in his/her students. There is certainly little comparable glory than to be used by God to help others mature in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The event that Paul described in these verses is identical with the biblical revelation concerning the judgment seat of Christ. As a result of his convert’s spiritual maturity, Paul could regard the time when his works will be evaluated as an occasion of glory and joy. Therefore, it would be best to understand that the reference is with regard to the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming, for it is then that believers will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the judgment seat, and will be granted crowns and rewards.

Thank you for allowing me the honor to provide ongoing Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to talk with me, or contact me by email or phone. I am praying for you personally throughout the day and week (1 Tim 2:1-4).

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