

HOLY WAITING

Living in Holiness as We Await the Return of Christ

A Holy Ministry

Key Idea:

Holy ministry is always done before the face of God — springing from pure motives, expressed in Christlike gentleness and holiness, and sustained through conflict until God rewards faithful labor with fruit.

Key Text:

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² 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. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ 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. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² 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. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 ESV

Key Points:

- **Holy Ministry Endures Opposition** — Paul’s team had already been “shamefully treated at Philippi” (Acts 16) before arriving in Thessalonica, and they encountered fresh conflict there as well (Acts 17). Yet they had boldness in God to declare the Gospel anyway, and their labor proved not to be “in vain” (v1). God rewarded their faithful endurance with fruit. The same promise holds for all who faithfully sow God’s Word: “Your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58). We are responsible for faithful proclamation; God is responsible for the harvest.
- **Holy Ministry Flows from Pure Motives** — Paul defends his team not against specific charges but to establish a positive standard: their appeal did not spring from error, impurity, or deception. They were not after flattery, money, or human glory. Rather, they had been “entrusted with the gospel” by God and therefore ministered for His approval, not man’s (Galatians 1:10). To live and minister coram Deo — before the face of God — means that God’s evaluation is primary and the approval of others is secondary. We cannot serve two masters.

- **Holy Ministry Is Gentle and Incarnational** — Though Paul’s team had apostolic authority and could have “make demands,” they chose instead to be “gentle... like a nursing mother” (v7). And they shared not only the Gospel but their very lives, because the Thessalonians had become dear to them (v8). Ministry that is domineering or conducted only from a distance is not the pattern the New Testament envisions. True shepherding requires personal presence, genuine affection, and shared life.
- **Holy Ministry Is Built on a Holy Life** — Paul points to his team’s “labor and toil” (working night and day so as not to burden anyone) and their “holy and righteous and blameless” conduct as evidence that their ministry was genuine (vv9–10). Chrysostom noted that Paul did not rest his ministry on miracles but on irreproachable character and apt teaching. We cannot pass on to others what we do not possess ourselves. Holy ministry flows from a life the Spirit is actively forming into the image of Christ.
- **Holy Ministry Calls Others to Walk Worthy of God** — Paul’s gentleness was never spineless. Like a father with his children, the apostolic team “exhorted... encouraged... and charged” each one to “walk in a manner worthy of God” (vv11–12). The verbs are present tense — this was continuous, personal, and individual. Genuine shepherds refuse to leave people comfortable in sin; they tenderly and persistently call believers toward holiness and away from what dishonors God.

Discussion Questions:

- Bret opened by noting that ministry scandals are not new — they plagued the medieval church and they plague the church today. Why do you think ministry corruption is so recurring and so damaging? What does the fact that Paul felt the need to defend his team’s character in 1 Thessalonians 2 tell us about how long this has been a problem?
- Paul says his team “had boldness in our God” to declare the Gospel even after suffering at Philippi and even in the midst of fresh conflict at Thessalonica (vv1–2). What is the relationship between suffering and boldness in ministry? Have you experienced a time when enduring hardship made you more, rather than less, courageous in speaking about Christ?
- The promise that “your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58) applies to faithful Gospel sowing even when we don’t see immediate fruit. Where in your own life — in a relationship, a family situation, a ministry context — are you tempted to grow weary or to conclude that your faithfulness is not producing results? How does this promise speak to that?
- Paul identifies three corrupt motives he and his team explicitly rejected: flattery, greed, and the pursuit of human glory (vv5–6). Which of these do you think poses the greatest temptation for Christian leaders today? Which poses the greatest temptation for you personally as you seek to influence others for Christ?
- The organizing principle Bret identified is ministry done coram Deo — “before the face of God.” Galatians 1:10 says we cannot simultaneously seek God’s approval and man’s. What are the practical signs that a person (or a church) has drifted from seeking God’s approval to seeking human approval? What does that drift feel like from the inside?

- Paul compares holy ministry to a nursing mother — gentle, close, self-giving — and says the team shared “not only the gospel... but our lives as well” (v8). Bret applied this by saying we should look for a shepherd, not just a teacher, and that ministry conducted only from a screen is not the New Testament vision. What does incarnational, life-sharing ministry look like in practice in a local church? In your own relationships?
- Paul’s character was publicly verifiable: the Thessalonians themselves were witnesses to how his team had lived among them (v10). How important is it that the character and lifestyle of those who minister to us be observable to us? What does it suggest when a leader actively resists personal accountability or keeps his private life hidden from those he leads?
- Chrysostom argued that Paul’s effectiveness rested not on miracles but on irreproachable conduct and apt teaching. We often assume the opposite — that results, charisma, or organizational skill are the marks of genuine ministry. How does Paul’s standard in this passage reorder those priorities? What would change in how we evaluate churches and leaders if we consistently applied this?
- Paul’s gentleness did not mean silence about sin. He “exhorted... encouraged... and charged” each one to walk worthy of God — personally and persistently (vv11–12). How do you hold together gentleness and courage in your own relationships? Is there someone in your life right now who needs you to speak truth to them in love rather than simply offer comfort?
- The Table of Holy Waiting: How does the Lord’s Table reinforce the vision of holy ministry Paul describes in this passage? What do we receive at this Table that we cannot generate in ourselves — and that makes genuine, holy, coram Deo ministry possible?

For Further Study:

- Read Acts 16:11–40 to understand what Paul and his team suffered at Philippi before arriving in Thessalonica. Then re-read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–2 in light of that backstory. How does knowing the cost they had already paid deepen your appreciation for their boldness?
- Study Galatians 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 15:58 alongside 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Paul returns to these themes — God’s approval versus man’s, and labor that is not in vain — across multiple letters. What does their recurrence suggest about how central they were to his understanding of faithful ministry?
- This week, do a personal motive check using the three tests Paul implies in vv5–6: Am I using flattery to gain influence? Is financial benefit or security shaping how I speak or stay silent? Am I seeking recognition or glory from others? Bring what you find honestly before God in prayer.
- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by [series](#), by [Scripture](#), or by [topic](#) for a deeper study of [leadership](#), [holiness](#), [endurance](#), [correction](#), and [the church](#).

