1 Thessalonians - Commentaries by J. Wilson Smith

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, Qualities of a True Servant

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1 Thess. 2:1-12

The first twelve verses of this chapter give us twelve qualities of a true servant of Christ, and should be pondered carefully.

Humility

The apostle invokes the witness of the saints to the character of his service among them, and a better witness he could not have called. He says ye “know... that it was not in vain;” that went without saying, since they themselves were the fruit of his labors — the standing proof of the God-given ministry they had received through him. yet he only says that his entrance among them was “not in vain.” He blows no high-sounding trumpet, nor does he tabulate splendid results. he might have done so, but he simply says that it was “not in vain;” and in such an expression we have the first sign of a true servant of Christ, we mark his deep and genuine spirit of HUMILITY.

Courage

They knew, he affirms, the suffering and insults which befell him in his labors at Philippi, even as we know that the inner prison of that city was the cradle of the church in Europe, and that the stripes and prayers of the apostle and his fellow laborer there were the seed of the great harvest of that continent.

They knew his adversities, but they saw that such things did not deter him in the glorious work to which he had been called. Thus their own sufferings were endured by their father in Christ. The gospel which he preached, and which they believed, met with opposition; but this was to him no hindrance to his labor in it. He was bold in his God to preach it. Here we see his COURAGE.

Purity

“Deceit” may well stamp the pleading, of the serpent; “uncleanness” that of the servant of unrighteousness and the seeker of reward like Balaam; and “guile” the ways of the Pharisee, for all such may become angels of light and masters of vile deception; but this man of god used no such artifices. he had the gospel of God for his subject; and, with such a subject, he could not but be true. His exhortation was marked by PURITY.

Fidelity to the Truth

A sacred trust was this, indeed, committed not to cherub, or seraph, or heavenly being, but to mortal man, so that he should be the channel through which waters so pure should flow to all around him. Never was trust more sacred, or privilege more exalted. and, as under this charge, this servant had the pleasure of God before him. Oh! how easy to tickle the ears of men and to preach smooth things; to pare down the gospel to human ideas or wishes; to put darkness for light and light for darkness; to please men by a denial of sin and eternal punishment, and the holiness of god and the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ! How easy to flatter fallen man into the belief that he needs no “new birth,” no repentance, that he can save himself, that heaven and hell are mere ideas; that God is only merciful and that “judgment to come” is a fable! How pleasing is such flattery to men. yes, but such a falsification of the revealed mind of God must bring judgment upon its authors. Such a man was not Paul. He was marked in his preaching by FIDELITY TO THE TRUTH.

Sincerity

Flattering words are the very worst words anyone can use. May we avoid all flattery. In this case Paul appealed to their knowledge of facts. They knew full well that he never flattered; but then might he not have coveted? He did not, and in this secret matter, where, perhaps, no human eye could see, he calls god to witness. In all this we learn his SINCERITY.

Contentment

This was the proof that he did not covet. As an apostle of Christ he might have been burdensome, he might surely have enjoyed the carnal help of those to whom he carried spiritual blessing; but he made no such claim; “neither of you, nor yet of others,” sought he that pecuniary gain to himself which he might have had as being an apostle. in this we see his CONTENTMENT.

Gentleness

Here we have the opposite of covetousness. a nurse or a mother cherishing her children gives a beautiful idea of care and solicitude for others. Naught here of the “thief” whose object is gain, the “hireling” who serves for pay, or the “wolf” that scatters the flock (John 10), but the gentleness of the mother, the charming tenderness, the faithful love, the restoring touch, the absence of force and violence and the cruel sword. No proud anathema or distant frown, but the love that bears and forbears and that uses towel and water (John 13). May God grant us all more true GENTLENESS.

Affectionate Desire

To impart the gospel is no small privilege, for imparting is more than preaching; but the imparting of the soul, the life, for those to whom you preach! Who of us knows anything of this? It is death for the sake of others. The preaching that proceeds merely from the brain may be very clear, but it is utterly powerless. The whole soul must be in the labor — the very life, so to say, must be communicated! Oh! It must be heart work. Yes, heart work! Call it a human effort if you please, but the man who preaches from the heart is just the man who knows best that the merely human element is useless. But it is “out of the belly” that true living waters must flow (John 7:38), else they are but “ice-floes.” Here we find the servant’s AFFECTIONATE DESIRE.

Devotion

Their memories could bear witness to the incessant toil of this servant of Christ. His object was to preach the gospel, and that without charge on any but himself. This involved manual labor night and day, he found no work excessive, no drudgery painful, so long as he could make known freely, and without the monetary assistance of any, the precious ministry committed to him. It need hardly be added that in such extraordinary DEVOTION we read the invaluable lesson of laboriousness.

Godley Behavior

To such a manner of life they were witnesses, for it was lived in their presence; but God, too, who seeth in secret, was a witness of the hidden springs of the life of his dear servant.

Time would fail to dwell on the holiness, justice, and unblameableness which should lie behind all Christian service and testimony. Without them all outward activity is in vain. No life is so really beautiful as one marked by these qualities. Everyone should be known by his GODLY Behavior.

Fatherly Solicitude

They knew this fatherly care. Everyone of them had been counseled and advised by the apostle separately, tenderly, not merely from the platform, but one by one in such a way that none of them could fail to see a solicitude for his welfare that found its source in the warm affections of a father. Thus we see the working of FATHERLY SOLICITUDE.

Minstry Rightly Aimed

This is the aim of the service of the true servant of God. The call was of God, but the instrument was the servant. The objective was, first the kingdom, and then the glory; and with no object short of this the laborer toiled; and, in view of this, he pressed on them a life, and course of conduct, that should be worthy of God. Here we have a MINISTRY RIGHTLY AIMED.

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