

Stamp Of Approval

Pastor James Richards

27 April 2024

Father, we're just grateful for the leaders that have shared the gospel with us. God, I know they weren't perfect people, full of false, but God, in most cases, their desire was to glorify Christ, to lead people to him. We thank you for them, Lord. Thank you that Jim and Sue were able to go to Peru and see the fruits of their ministry there. And thank you for this man.

Junior, ask your blessing on him. And, Lord, as you give him a vision, provide the resources to fulfill that vision to reach young people in that town. Then, Lord, I pray for the women's retreat that's coming up this week and asking your blessing on it, God, that you'd be working in each woman's heart. Pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

You may be seated.

My first summer in the ministry, I had an opportunity to go to a Bible conference in Denver. And so I went down there, and I honestly can't remember a thing that was taught in that conference. I have to admit that. But in many ways, that conference changed my life and the way it did, that I was sitting at a small table for lunch, and there were about four or five other pastors at my table who knew each other, and they were talking with one another. And I was kind of eavesdropping on what they were saying.

And one of the pastors said, you need to get Martin Luis Jones series on Romans. It'll change your life. And my ears kind of perked up. Oh. And so I went in the library.

ShepherdsStream.com

It was over \$100, money I did not have. But I purchased that series on Romans for Martyn Lloyd Jones. I've got all his works today. I share that because I was reading a story about Martyn Lloyd Jones this week, and evidently he'd gone to another church to preach an hour sermon. And after the message, the pastor of that church asked him, how do you feel?

And Martin Lloyd Jones replied, tired. Tired. And then he said, what I've just done is about the closest a man can come to childbirth.

And he quoted Galatians 4:19. My little children, for whom I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. And I have to confess that I, like many pastors, have experienced this anguish. Lord, does my ministry matter? Is it producing fruit?

Does it please you? How is it working out? And I think every true minister of the gospel, whether it's a pastor, a Sunday school teacher, or just someone sharing their faith with people in town, they should feel that same thing, because they know that they will stand before God at the end of their life, and they'll give an account for their ministry. Well, we've looked in chapter one at twelve of what Paul considered a model church, and we saw some great things about this church in Thessalonica. Now, in chapter two, he's going to look at the people who are ministering to that church and what kind of ministers should they be, and describes a model christian worker.

Before we look at that model, I want you to notice a phrase that is used nine times in this book and four times in the second chapter. And that phrase is, you know, you know, and he's telling them, and he's telling us that there are things that you and I should know as a Christian and shouldn't have to be reminded of those things. We should know them. And so Paul is wanting us to know in this chapter some things about the people who minister to you and I and to others things that we should know about them. There's a debate about this chapter whether Paul is just trying to defend his ministry because there are people accusing him of not being a good minister.

He had to leave town at night because of the opposition, had been there for a month, or at the most two, and had to leave, and they were accusing him of really not caring.

Debate on that. And others are saying, no. He's presenting a model of what a true minister of the gospel should be like. I think he's talking about both, but I'm going to look at it from the perspective of modeling christian work in the church, in missions, in our homes and in our society.

So just a couple things here. First of all, Paul models true ministry through hardships. Through hardships. He is saying here in chapter two that ministry is not a honeymoon. Okay?

If you've been involved in ministry, there are some great things about it, and we're glad that we can do it. But it is no honeymoon. Paul just spent a few weeks there, but his ministry was successful. He said it wasn't in vain. It bore fruit.

There's results that came out of my time there, but it wasn't a honeymoon. We all know what a honeymoon is, right? It's that period of time in our life when we get married and we see no faults and we hear no complaints, and, man, everybody is just, oh, they're wonderful. And then the honeymoon ends, doesn't it? And we realize, no, they've got faults, just like everyone does.

That's true in marriage, but it's also true in the ministry. And the fact is, true ministry is messy. You know why? Because people are messy. And we're all dealing with people.

And so Paul shared that he suffered and was shamefully treated and experienced conflict at Philippi. But that didn't diminish his boldness to declare the gospel of God. One of the real tests of a successful ministry is, how are you doing when things aren't going well, when it's not living up to your expectations, when people aren't saying, wow, pastor, you're really something, we're lucky to have you. Instead, they're kind of like, how did we get him? And that's when you start to discover what someone is in.

I've had the opportunity to read a lot of christian biographies over the last 40, 50 years, and it seems that there's one thing that's common to almost all of them, and that's they had to work through hardships, trials and disappointments and discouragement before God really accomplished anything in their lives. One of my

favorite shows growing up was the honeymooners. Anybody ever see that show? Jackie Gleason.

Jackie was Ralph Kramden, married to Alice Kramden. They lived in a little flat in Brooklyn, and their life was anything but a honeymoon. Ralph was almost impossible to live with. He was loud, he was bragger, he just was difficult. And yet somehow their marriage worked.

They loved each other, and they worked through the difficulties. Successful ministries thrive when people are willing to work through the hard things in their life that they don't give up when the honeymoon is over. And in a church, a pastor in a church, there's often a honeymoon period, whether it's a week or whether it's a few months. But it comes to an end, and now we're dealing with real life. And the point is, real ministers continue to declare the gospel of God in the midst of conflict.

In other words, they don't give up just because it's hard. So that's the atmosphere of true ministry. Second, Paul models what true servants of God don't do. He's going to mention what they do do at the end of this chapter, but in the first part of chapter two, he mentions what they don't do. Often we focus on what a person does.

Oh, he's wonderful at this, he's wonderful at that. Instead of sometimes focusing on, well, at least he's not this or he's not that. He's not a bad person. He's trying hard, the best he can to do what he can. Kind of like when you go to the doctor, right?

And you get to the doctor's office and they give you this little form, don't they? And then it says, do you have any of such and such? And sometimes there might be 30, 60, 90 different things. And I guarantee you the more no's that you put down there, the better health you're in, right. In the same way in our life, the more no's that we see in this passage, in second chapter of chapters of Thessalonians, the better off we're doing.

And so there's seven boxes here that Paul clicks off, checks off as far as his ministry as a model for other believers. And it's boxes that you and I, with the grace of God, we should be able to check those also. So we're just going to look at them real quickly and

just looking through the passage and following them. And first of all, he says in verse three, for our appeal does not spring from error. In other words, they did not spread error concerning the gospel.

They were concerned was sharing the truth. They preached the word of God to them, not their own word. It wasn't their feelings or their opinions or this is what it'd be nice to do. They focus on the word of God, the pure word of God. You may remember Jesus admonition to the sadducees when they were testing Jesus and trying to find fault, and they brought up this woman that had been married to seven different guys and.

And then ask the question, a gotcha question, whose wife is she going to be when she gets to heaven? And Jesus responded to them, said, you are an error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. And we are here to proclaim the scriptures and to proclaim the word of God. You don't need to hear what I think about things or what someone else thinks about things. We need to hear the word of God.

And that way we avoid error. And the way we do that is we study the word, we meditate on the word, and we preach the word.

And good ministers, whether it's a pastor, whether it's a church leader, whether it's a Sunday school teacher, whether it's in your home, they focus on the truth of God. They don't spread air. Number two, he says there was no impurity in his life. No air, but also no impurity. And that means that Paul fought the battle for sexual purity.

He realized the pressure that was on him to give in to the flesh. And the fact is, no one, including people that are involved in ministry, are immune from the lusts of the flesh. And they have to battle against that. It is a constant battle. But we have the ability to be victorious when we offer ourselves or present ourselves to God in service.

And that means we say no to the fleshly desires that are in our lives. It is astonishing when you read the news, and especially christian news, the number of christian leaders who have fallen prey to sexual immorality and a plague of christian workers who have given in to the flesh. And Paul told the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality. And if that was true back then, how much more true is it now? And so if you're going to

be involved in serving the Lord in any way, you have victory over sexual immorality.

Number 30 says there was no deception or deceit in his life. That word, deception is the word that was used for fishing. And when you're fishing, you take a hook and what do you do? You put bait on it and you're hoping it's going to deceive the fish into thinking that, wow, lunch. But if it falls for the deceit, for the bait, it finds itself hooked and unable to get away.

And you see ministries today that they deceive people into thinking, come to our church and have a wonderful time. We've got this. We've got that. Oh, you'll enjoy that. Instead of sharing the message of the gospel, offering a feel good kind of message to get people to let down their guard and get involved.

The problem with this is once the feel good is gone and they're faced with the real pressures of life, many are saying, I was tricked into coming here. I wasn't here for the right reason. And God said, we did not use deceit. They gave the whole gospel, which included the fact that we're all sinners and we all need salvation and only Jesus Christ can do that. Paul preached the word, relying on the Holy Spirit to generate true repentance and holiness.

No trickery involved. And people comment today. How many times do you go to church and do you hear the message of repentance from sin? Oh, you can have your best life now. You know everything's going to work out well, all of the things that people offer, but not really presenting the true gospel.

Fourth, he says there was no flattery. In other words, a true pastor doesn't butter people up. Don't you love to be buttered up? We all do. Oh, that feels nice.

We went to the movie last Friday. I want to promote this movie, unsung hero, the story of Rebecca St. James, a gospel singer. It's a great movie of family and faith. It's down at Ocean Shores and it'd be good to support a good movie like that.

But no, flattery did not mask the truth. Oh, the reason I mentioned that is we got popcorn and I put too much butter on it. If it had been real butter, it wouldn't have

been so bad. But it wasn't even real butter, and I just left it, bleh. Kind of flavor.

Until I went to bed that night. Paul did not use flackery. And the truth is, we need to know the truth about ourselves. We don't need to be buttered up. Proverbs 27 six says, faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

And sometimes we need the truth about ourselves so that we can respond to that truth and be what God wants us to be. Number five, he says, there was no greed. No greed. The ministry today is just littered with greedy people, people that are somehow enriching themselves through the gospel and through the offerings that are given by sometimes poor people. To support that ministry and see a lot of manipulation, you need to give, God will bless you, do this, do that.

And the result of that is these people are living lifestyles that we can't even begin to imagine, and lavish lifestyles.

Sometimes the greed is not financial. Sometimes it's power. And working to get as many people in our ministry, look how big my church is. Poaching from other churches, doing everything they can to get people to follow after them. And true ministers are like Abraham.

After Abraham had been abducted, Abraham got all of his servants together, and he went after Abraham and the other servants in lot, and he destroyed those kings, and he brought them all back. And the king of Sodom said, hey, thanks. I want to give you all of this stuff that you captured and brought back to the city. And Abraham refused the gifts because he didn't want anyone to claim that a sinner is what made him rich. And often you find out a true heart by what they're willing to refuse.

That'd be nice. Yeah, I enjoy those things. You know, that's not why I'm here. That's not what God wants to do. And so we want to be careful there.

We need to watch out if people are putting pressure on you to give. And they may be doing some good things, but if their lifestyle is such that they're using those resources for themselves, that's a sign that we should look at and be warned by too many people

use the ministry to enrich themselves, and that is wrong and don't have time to go into it. But there are ministers out there that are multimillionaires, and all they've ever done is ministry. So where did that money come from? Came from the pockets of people like you and I.

The 6th thing he says, there's no self glory.

We didn't seek glory from people. In other words, true ministers do not put themselves on a pedestal. Look at me, look how wonderful I am. Aren't you lucky to be able to be sitting at my feet? They do not do that.

They are just one with those members. They've got a little bit different job, but they are no different than anyone else. A true leader is tested by the praise he receives, and if we don't reflect that praise back to God, then something is wrong and it becomes more about the person than it does about Jesus Christ. Proverbs tells us that a man is tested by the praise he receives. A true leader should be humble, reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ.

That is his work, not mine. It's God power at work through us accomplishing his purposes that will last for eternity. And if it's about the leader, those purposes usually don't last. When the leader's gone, the ministry's gone, and the results are gone. And so if you see someone in the ministry start to get a big head, well, do what you can to put a pinprick in that head.

And if it doesn't work, then find yourself a different ministry, okay? It's not about the person. We want to be careful there, and it's a hard one, it's a hard one for people to face, because we're all susceptible to that.

And if you don't leave, that ego will crush you in some way or not. And you want to get out from underneath that. A true man of God is a servant, not a star. And then the last thing he mentions, the last negative, he says he didn't make demands on people, he was not a demanding person. One of the hallmarks of cults is they demand that this is the way you're going to do it, this is the only way.

And often we see that in churches where the leaders will demand that you do one thing or another, and they don't leave for God to work. They coerce people to do things that they may not naturally want to do. And one of the ways that they do that is through guilt. If you don't do it, who will? And pressure people into maybe doing a ministry that God had not called them to.

When I was taking my master's course at Northwest University, the pastor of a large church there came and spoke to us, and six, 7000 members, 25 people on staff and he shared how hard the ministry was, and it was hard because we're always having to recruit volunteers and they burn out in two or three years in the ministries we give them. So we're always recruiting, trying to keep the programs and the church going. And I believe what that does, it robs people of the joy of serving with a willing heart and allowing the Holy Spirit to put it on their hearts to do the work that he has them to do to accomplish God's purposes. Paul said, God loves a cheerful giver, and that's not just finances. That's in your ministry, your time, your resources.

And when we start doing it out of oh, I have to or the pastor is going to be upset, then we start to lose that joy and it's not fruitful. So we want to be careful that a ministry is not demanding. Well, that's quite a list, seven things that we shouldn't be doing. And just in case you've forgotten all seven things, we won't give a test on that. They're right there in the passage.

Paul sums it up in verse four, if you want to look at that. But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel and everyone involved in ministry, they should be approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel in some way. The good news that Jesus Christ saved says so we speak not to please man, but to please God. Who tests our heart. Who tests our heart.

We tend to focus on the out things, don't we? How good of a speaker are they? Can they sing? Are they a good leader? All good things.

But God, not that he doesn't choose those things. God is looking at the inward man, and that's what these things are talking about, the character of a person. Are they in it

for the right reason to please God? Ed Welch wrote a book titled, when people are big, God is small. When people are big, God is small.

And we've got to come to that place in our lives where we realize, I've been called by God to please him, not to please people. Now I think when we please God that will please people, but we're not there for their acceptance or adulation, there to serve God. And he will test us on that. You may remember when Jesus went up on the mount of transfiguration. He took Peter, John and James with him.

They'd fallen asleep and they woke up and there's Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah. And for good Jews, who could be greater than Moses and Elijah, they were so excited that, hey, let's build some little houses for you guys. We'll just sit here and enjoy things. And all of a sudden, Moses and Elijah were gone. And God spoke to them out of the cloud and said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. And that really sums up where, if someone's going to be ministering in any way, is he the beloved son to you, the one who pleased God? Are you listening to him? And if you are, the thing that will come out of that is you want to please him more than you want to please people. And God can use that to accomplish his purposes.

It may not be a big ministry, and it may not be flashy, and it may not seem to be impressive, but God is the one who changes hearts, and only he can change a heart. And when we live to please him, I think that that's what he does. That's good advice for all of us. Look to the Son, listen to his voice, live to please him. And when we do, I think he'll be well pleased with our life and we'll stand before him unashamed.

Whether our ministry was successful or not is not the issue. The issue was, was I faithful to lift up Christ in my ministry and glorify God with it. And I believe when we do, God will be pleased with our lives and our ministry, and he will accomplish his purposes in our life, and we can trust him. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for this example that Paul has given us out of this book to the Thessalonians and God. It's easy for us to be impressed with the stature of a person,

with their abilities, with their accomplishments, and nothing wrong with that. But you tell us in your scripture that God does not look on the outward man as man does. God looks at the heart. And I pray, Father, for each one of us that is wanting to serve Christ, however that might be, it might be in our home, it might be in a church, it might be in a mission field, that the goal of our life would be to please you in any way we can, that we allow you to make changes in our heart, God.

That we wouldn't see these negative things cropping up in our ministries that take away from your glory. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.