THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE SPIRITUAL LEADER (1)
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

If there was ever an example of true, biblical spiritual leadership, it was the life of Paul. His life was given to serving the Lord God, loving the people of God, and encouraging them on to spiritual maturity to bear witness to a lost and dying world in which they lived in.

The letter of Paul to the saints in Thessalonica reveals the heart and character of a spiritual leader, and his heart’s motivation. While we live in a time of many “so called spiritual leaders” it is wise to go back to the pages of Scripture and discern the character of that true spiritual leader that is commended by God, and such was the life of Paul.

The saints of Thessalonica were under persecution. Jews were convincing others that the preaching of Christ would destroy their freedom, jobs and businesses. In writing this letter, Paul’s desire and aim was to build up the saints and encourage them on to maturity. Because there was much confusion in the day of Paul, he wanted no one to misunderstand him, his motivations, and his ministry for the gospel.

1. THERE IS THE MARK OF A FRUITFUL MINISTRY. (v.1) One of the key characteristics of that true spiritual leader, that minister, that servant of God is the fact that their ministry is marked with fruitfulness.

Paul made it clear that his ministry among them was not empty but was “fruitful”. Paul had focused on preaching God’s Word to “people”, ministering to “people”, encouraging “people” in their walk before God. Where there is a preacher, minister, or spiritual leader serving the Living God, there is a focus on Paul never left a count, a number to those that he ministered to, but he declared the “fruitfulness” of his ministry. However, for the false spiritual leader, there is a desire for: acclaim, prestige, popularity, and even money.

To the false spiritual leader, the desire to affect people’s lives for the glory of God is not there. When Paul gives the summary of his ministry among the people of the Thessalonians, he declares that his time was not “vain”. But rather he was focused on teaching to them the wonderful truth of God by the Spirit of God.

2. THERE IS THE MARK OF STRONG PREACHING IN THE MIDST OF OPPOSITION. (v.2) To understand this letter properly, it must be understood that Paul was shamefully mistreated and imprisoned by some business men in Phillippi.

Paul was forced by the city officials to leave the city. However, even in the midst of his trials, he was not discouraged. Paul didn’t give up the ministry because he had been persecuted. He moved on to another city…namely Thessalonica. However, even there, there was mistreatment and persecution. Yet, Paul didn’t allow that to distract him, or discourage him. He continued to preach with power, and boldness in the Spirit of God to all that God opened the door to.
Paul’s life reveals the character of a true spiritual leader. He is one that stands firm in good times, and in bad. He stays true irregardless the social climate of the time.

He stays true in the midst of persecution, ridicule and rejection. In the heart of a true spiritual leader, he knows that he is called of God, and that one day, God will evaluate the “entirety of the body of his life’s work”, and God will evaluate properly. Paul didn’t want God to evaluate a quitter.

Irregardless of the circumstances, Paul preached boldly the gospel of Christ, and his bold preaching could not be overlooked by his critics.

When you listen to spiritual leadership, wherever it may be, it is vitally important to ask, “Does this preacher, minister preach boldly out of the overflow of a life surrendered to God”. Bold preaching is preaching the gospel of God, the good news of the forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. It is through the preaching of the gospel that God chooses to save lives.

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.” (2 Cor. 4:5)

The word “boldly” means to speak boldly and freely; to speak publicly. Sadly, all too many believers are “secret believers”. Only those in church really know that they are saved…for their witness will not be shared in a public way to the world.

3. THERE IS THE MARK OF PREACHING THE PURE GOSPEL ACCOMPAÑED BY A PURE LIFE (v.3)

First, When it comes to preaching, the true minister preaches a “pure gospel”. In the life of Paul, he didn’t tip toe around or bypass controversial subjects. He didn’t attempt to tickle the ears of people by preaching subjects that were “user friendly”. He didn’t concentrate on pleasing subjects in order to win approval and popularity of others. It was the heart of Paul to preach the pure gospel. The gospel of the resurrection of Christ for the sins of mankind, for all are sinners before the sight of a Holy God. The message Paul preached was not the message he created, but the message given to Him by the Lord God. The message he preached was the message of the cross, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Where there is a spiritual leader preaching to please God, he preaches the gospel in purity. Paul had no right to change the message, and neither does a single preacher today have a right to change the message of the gospel. Yet, many have replaced it with “a message that focuses around self”. The life of Paul was a life that was perfectly straightforward with the truth of God.

Second, the true spiritual leader lives a life that is given to purity and cleanness. Paul declared that there was no “akatharisias” (uncleanness) about his life. Some in Paul’s day declared that he was using his position immorally, which reveals the ungodliness of the times of Paul. Yet Paul declared that there was no “uncleanness” about him. It is high on the mind of a spiritual leader when it comes to matters of purity and cleanness. A true spiritual leader, through wisdom guards
his character and integrity, knowing that Satan would love to cause him to blunder, and sin, and to devastate the lives of others.

While Paul could not keep others from talking, his life could prevent others from finding an ammunition to fight with. Just as Paul had rumors spread about him, reveals that we cannot keep others from spreading rumors. Yet, one thing is abundantly clear…God knows the truth.

Proverbs 5:21  For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.

4.  THERE IS THE MARK OF PREACHING TO PLEASE GOD FIRST.  It was the heartbeat of Paul to preach to please the Living God first and foremost. Irregardless of how many received it, or received it not, did not alter the truth that Paul was to preach to bring glory to God, by preaching the gospel in truth and in love. The Living Bible puts v. 4, this way. “For we speak as messengers from God, trusted by him to tell the truth; we change his message not one bit to suit the taste of those who hear it; for we serve God alone, who examines our heart’s deepest thoughts.”

The reality of mankind is that we don’t want to hear messages that we are sinners. We don’t want to hear about the judgment of God. We don’t want to hear the fact that God shall call us into complete evaluation of our lives. Yet, that is the truth of Scripture and what Paul preached. For Paul knew that God would call him to accountability for how he handed the Word of God.

A true spiritual leader, preacher, minister, pastor, realizes that he has been chosen to be the messenger of God to the people entrusted to him, and to live an obedient life before God, there must be first and foremost a desire to please God. Whenever a preacher preaches to please God, there is never a “watering down” of the message of God. There is “no backpeddling” when it comes to the harder issues of life. Paul preached boldly because he lived in the wonder and love of God, and sought to serve Him with all his being.

Paul preached in boldness because he knew the love of God and what it was to be loved by the God of the universe. There were two reason that Paul sought to please the Living God.

First…God was the person who had trusted him with the gospel. The fact is, God owns the gospel, in a love relationship with His Son. It was God that called Paul, and men had nothing to do with Paul’s calling. God called Paul to preach the gospel, and Paul knew that God would care for him until the end.

Second…it was God alone that would try his heart and judge him. Paul, along with every other preacher, and believer would give account for his life, walk, opportunities and most of all the preaching of the gospel. Men can cause difficulty for us on earth, but it will be before the Lord Jesus Christ that we stand…and Paul knew this all too well. Paul didn’t want to stand in the presence of Christ living ashamed of Him, as a minister of God. God gives a strong word to those who live their lives ashamed of Jesus, and their relationship to Jesus. Luke 9:26  For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.