

1 Thessalonians 2:6-12

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[0 : 0 0] to the passage that we read, the second passage that we read in Paul's letter, his first letter to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians and chapter 2. Now, as we've already indicated, this morning is a very special service. We will, immediately after the sermon, be celebrating the sacrament of baptism. I love baptisms. I love infant baptisms. And it's not just because babies are cute, though undoubtedly they are. It's not just that they are very happy family occasions, though that is certainly true. What I find most thrilling about baptizing the children of believers is that it serves as a visible reminder of the grace of God and of His gracious covenant promise to be our God and, wonderfully, the God of our children. Baptism is about our covenant children receiving the covenant sign instituted by our covenant God. One important part of the sacrament in the manner in which we take part in it are the vows that are taken by the parents.

In actual fact, what is being done by parents bringing their children to be baptized is that they are both professing and promising. We call them the vows. In actual fact, there's only one vow or promise, but there are, or there is the opportunity also to profess faith, declare what we believe, declare that we believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that we believe Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.

And then there is, properly speaking, the vow or promise, where we make a promise concerning the upbringing of the child to be baptized. The wording can vary from congregation to congregation, but the manner in which the promise will be presented this morning is as follows. Do you promise in dependence on God's promised help by your prayers, teaching and example, to bring up your child in the instruction and discipline of the Lord? Now, this is a solemn promise. It's solemn because it is a promise that we make before God, and solemn also because it concerns a matter of such importance, the bringing up of our children in the faith. And of course, that promise will be especially important for those who today commit and respond to that promise, but it is also and should serve as a reminder for all of us who at some point have made that promise, sort of a very similar promise when our own children were baptized.

And in that sense, the challenge is for all of us who have made such a promise. Now, the matter of instructing our children is one that occupies the attention of God in the teaching that He gives us in the Bible on many occasions. Now, that shouldn't surprise us. God is so concerned that we would bring up our children as we ought in the faith that He gives us considerable, a great deal of instruction in the matter. I want us to consider one passage where we can draw such instruction. Now, we'll notice as we turn to the passage, we've already read it, but as we consider it a little bit more carefully, we'll notice that it wasn't the author's primary intention in writing what he writes to give us instruction concerning the matter of parenting, of bringing up our children in the faith. That's not his primary concern. But in addressing another concern, he does touch on the matter in a way that is helpful and instructive. Now, what we're going to do now is we're going to read again part of the passage that we read in 1 Thessalonians in chapter 2. We're going to read the verses that particularly will occupy our attention this morning, which are verses 10 to 13. So, if you could have your Bibles open, not just for right now when we read these verses, but I think it would be helpful just to have them open there as we go through our consideration of these verses. But we'll read them again now.

1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 10. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the Word of man, but as it actually is the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe. Now, I've mentioned

already that Paul's primary concern here as he writes this part of his letter to the Christians in Thessalonica is not to give them instruction in the matter of parenting. What he's doing in this part of the letter is really defending his own ministry among them. There were those who were questioning what he had done, questioning his motivation, questioning his methods, and attacking him from different directions.

[5 : 53] And Paul is concerned to set the record straight. And he does so by reminding them of how he had ministered among them. He's asking them to remember for themselves so that they can come to a conclusion. They're being bombarded with these other ideas by his opponents. And he's saying, well, just remember how it was that I served you and come to your own conclusions. It's not that Paul is desperately concerned about his own reputation, but he is concerned that any attack on him would undermine the message that he had brought to them. So, that is what he is about. And I think that comes out as we've read the passage, certainly when we read it with the verses that come before the ones that we've just read now. Now, in the course of this description of his ministry, he employs family metaphors. In fact, in the passage, as we were reading it, you maybe spotted how he compares himself to both a mother and a father. In verse 7, we have a very tender, motherly, maternal metaphor employed by the apostle. As apostles of Christ, we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children. Like a mother caring for her little children. Here's this great apostle, and yet this is the metaphor he uses. This is how we behaved among you. This is how we were concerned for you, like a mother caring for her little children. But then he also uses the metaphor of a father, and that's what's going to particularly occupy our attention this morning. In verse 11, he says, for you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging, and so on. Now, at the risk of repeating myself too much, even though Paul isn't primarily concerned with teaching his original readers, or indeed ourselves a couple of millennia later, on the matter of what is involved in being a mother or a father, he does do so by the very use of this language. And that's where we're coming from this morning.

What is it that we can learn about being a Christian mother, a Christian father, about being Christian parents entrusted with bringing up our children from the language that Paul uses here?

And the way we're going to divide our thoughts is under the following headings. We're going to talk about a father's desire. We're going to talk about a father's example, a father's task, a father's reward, and a father's gratitude. Now, all the headings make reference to a father.

The reason for that is that the verse that we're particularly interested in speaks of a father, and Paul compares himself to a father. But though that is the case, and though it is clear that Paul does have a view regarding the distinctive roles of mothers and fathers in the matter of bringing up their children, and that is clear, it is also true that the things that he says concerning the duties of a father also apply in great measure to a mother. And so we can legitimately, as we proceed, not only think about a father's task, a father's desire, a father's reward, and so on, but also a mother's desire, and a mother's example, a mother's task, a mother's reward, and a mother's gratitude. So let's think of each of these things as we can find them in this passage. First of all, a father's desire, or a mother's desire. What is Paul's great desire for those he describes and considers as his children? Well, what does he say there in verses 11 and 12? He speaks of dealing with them as a father with his own children. This involves encouraging, comforting, and urging them. And with what end in mind? What is his great desire for them? That they would live lives worthy of God. This is his great desire for the believers in Thessalonica, that they would live lives worthy of God. The language that Paul uses literally is to walk, to walk in a manner worthy of God.

And when Paul speaks of walking, he often uses that picture of walking as illustrative of life. Life is something that we walk through, and so it's quite legitimate to translate it in the way that it has been translated to live lives worthy of God. But perhaps the literal translation also has a strength to it, to walk in a manner worthy of God. This is his fatherly desire for the believers in Thessalonica. As a father, his concern for his children, so he as a father, as their spiritual father, his great desire, his great desire, is that they would walk worthy of God. Paul is concerned with the very direction and conduct of their lives. His desire is that their lives would be God-ward, that they would be God-like, that they would be God-pleasing. His desire is that those who belong to God's family would live in a manner that reflects their identity and indeed their paternity.

[11 : 49] And of course, the application to ourselves as parents is very evident. And the question that we can ask ourselves is the following one, is our greatest desire as Christian parents on behalf

of our children that they would walk worthy of God? What is your desire on behalf of your children? What do you most desire for them? I imagine you have many aspirations for them, that they would be healthy, that they would do well at school, that they would have good friends, that maybe as opportunity presents itself, they could go on to study and become workers who can have a family and a happy family, and a wife, a husband, children. All of these things, I imagine, we aspire for our children, that they would be happy whatever life throws at them, that they would know what it is to live a happy life. Now, all of these are worthy desires on behalf of our children. But what Paul reminds us here is that our greatest desire must be with Paul that our children would live lives worthy of God, that they would walk worthy of God. Just think for a moment how excited we are when our child takes his first steps, his first physical steps. You know, it's such an exciting moment, isn't it? We wait for it, we anticipate it, we're just wondering when it will happen. They're crawling, they begin to try and walk, but they can't quite take steps by themselves. With a little bit of help, they can. And then the day comes, that great excitement, when for the first time they walk by themselves. You know, and we phone granny, we phone grandpa, and we take pictures, and we, you know, put a Facebook update, you know, he's walking.

Well, I didn't because it didn't exist when my children were at that stage. But you know where I'm coming from. It's so exciting because they're walking. And I wonder if we could just capture some of that excitement when we think of them walking worthy of God. Does that excite us when our children walk worthy of God? When we see those first steps that give evidence of a love for Jesus and of a loyalty to the Lord? Does that excite us? Is this our greatest desire for our children? A father's desire finds expression here in the language that Paul uses. But we can go on. We can also notice here what we could call a father's example. It's good to desire good things. But desiring something, as we well know in life, isn't always enough. Just desiring something won't necessarily make it happen.

A father, a mother, parents who are serious and genuine in their desire that their children would walk worthy of God will seek to model such a life to their children. We are, whether we like it or not, examples for our children. We just are. We may be a good example. We may be a bad example. But we are an example. That is inescapable. It's just the way it is. If I had a pound for every time somebody said that my mannerisms in preaching and even just in conversation are just like my father's, I would be a wealthy man. It's just the way it is. It just, that's what happens. We are imitators. That's what we do. And as parents, we have to be so conscious and so aware that that is so. The example that we give is fundamental in terms of the future direction in the lives of our children. Now, these things are not cold formulas. It always works that way. There are children who can decide and in some measure go completely against the example of their parents. Of course, that happens, be it in a good direction or in a bad direction. But nonetheless, it remains true that our example is so fundamental. We have a God-given duty to model lives worthy of God. And Paul is very clear on this. He's very explicit in this regard.

What does he say in verse 10 as he introduces the picture, the metaphor of him being like a father with his children? What does he say there in verse 10? You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed. He's speaking of the example that he, and indeed his fellow missionaries, Silas and Timothy, the example that they gave to the believers in Thessalonica. He speaks of the nature of their example. Their conduct was holy, righteous, and blameless. It's also interesting how he speaks of, if you wish, the stage for their example. Where was it that they lived these holy, righteous, and blameless lives? He says, among you. Holy, righteous, and blameless among you. Among you. This wasn't an example from on high or from a distance. Paul and his companions lived among the Thessalonians. They could see the way they lived, the way they reacted, the way they responded to difficulties, to opposition on good days and bad days. They were among them. They were among them. They were among them, and they could see. And Paul is confident enough to be able to say, you are witnesses. You know, you saw us day after day. You saw us. You know that this is so. You know that this is not some fantasy of mine regarding our conduct. No, you are witnesses that this is how we behaved. Their example was visible, was marked by integrity. Indeed, Paul is able, humbly, but confidently, to call even on God as a witness to their conduct. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how lowly, righteous, and blameless we were. Yes, even God who reads the heart and the motivations of what we do. And of course, the challenge for us as parents, for you as a father, as a mother, what about your example to your children? Is your example one of a holy life, of righteous living, of blameless

conduct?

[18 : 37] Think about the different ways in which your children observe you in your conversation, in the way you speak to your husband or wife, in the way you speak to them, in the way you speak about others behind closed doors in your own home, the manner in which you respect or don't the truth, the manner in which you keep or don't keep promises.

Our example as parents is very much among our children. It's not from afar. It's not from a distant place where we can maybe get away with giving the impression that everything is as it should be. No, they see us as we really are. We can't con our kids. We know that's the case. We can con others, but we can't con our kids because they see just about everything. They see everything. We can't we can't hide from them who we really are. They see the real you. And what do they see? What do they see? Paul here speaks of a father's example. He says, I dealt with you as a father deals with his own children. And as he uses that language, he also presents himself and reminds them that he was an example to them. He was a fatherly example to them.

So a father's desire, a father's example, but we can also speak of a father's task. This really is the primary reason that Paul employs the metaphor of a father in describing his relationship with the Thessalonians, that he would illustrate what he had done for them.

And what had he done for them as a father? Well, there it's very clear. He says, I dealt with you as a father deals with his children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God. Let's notice the what he does, but also for whom he does it. What is it that Paul did as a father? Well, there are three verbs, to encourage, to comfort, and to urge. And what strikes me about these three verbs together is, it is such a beautiful, balanced trio of verbs to describe a father's duty to instruct and build up his children. Do you notice the wonderful balance in these three verbs? To encourage, to comfort, and to urge. Let's just quickly look at each of them in turn.

[21 : 11] And as we do, I think it's legitimate. I'm not altogether sure about this, but I think it's legitimate to look at each of these verbs in relation to that great desire of Paul that they would live life worthy of God. Now, you could argue that it's really just the third verb to urge that is particularly related to the matter of the Thessalonians living lives worthy of God. But I would suggest that the other two verbs are also relevant. They also have to do with that ultimate concern that they would live lives worthy of God. The encouraging, the comforting, certainly the urging, but I think all three. First of all, encouraging, sometimes translated appealing. As fathers and mothers, we are to consciously and persistently encourage our children to live lives worthy of God. We don't dispassionately command them, be that command accompanied with the prospect of punishment or reward. Rather, we encourage, we appeal. Our children must know, they must feel, I would say, that for us, their walking lives worthy of God is of the utmost importance, even in the manner in which we encourage and appeal to them that they would do so. But then also, the next verb that Paul uses as he compares himself to a father, he says that he comforted them. I wonder if we see this as a father's duty. We're distinguishing between fathers and mothers. Or do we think, well, that's the mother's job, to comfort the child. Well, Paul is clear. He couldn't be clearer. Fathers are to be comforters.

Mothers as well, of course. But we both have this task of comforting our children. We comfort our children in a myriad of circumstances, from the seemingly trivial to those times when our children face big-time disappointment or hurt or pain. But we also are to comfort our children in this matter of living lives worthy of God. In what sense? Where our children, as is true of us, will often fail to live such lives. What do we do when they fail to walk worthy of God? Do we just punish them and make clear how terribly disappointed we are with them? I'm not saying there isn't a place for just a punishment.

But alongside that, and I would suggest of even greater importance than that, is that we comfort them when they fail and when they fall short. We encourage, we comfort. And of course, for us to even be able to do that, what is necessary and what sometimes is missing is a close relationship with our children. If we don't have that close relationship with them, if there isn't that mutual trust with them, then it's going to be very difficult to do these things. But then finally, there's a third verb here regarding what Paul did as a father with his children. That's, he urged them. Now, in this duty, the connection with living lives worthy of God is so clear and indisputable, because this is precisely what Paul urged them to do. And the verb that he uses carries the idea of a solemn charge. You can't urge a child in a fleeting moment. You can't urge in a jovial manner. There's time for jovial moments, for laughing and for joking. Plenty time for that. But this matter of urging solemnly is

another matter. It requires another way of speaking. This is serious.

This concerns matters of internal significance. And if we are to urge our children, that requires content, and it also requires opportunity. It's not enough just to say, son, I want you to walk worthy of God.

That's what I want for you. We need to teach and explain what that involves. Notice how in this very passage, Paul goes on to recognize that what he had given to them, they had received as the Word of God. The instruction that he had brought them was God's Word. And this, of course, is the instruction that we must bring to our children as we would urge them with content, with explanation, that they would walk walk worthy of God. It requires content. It also requires opportunity. We need to make sure that there is a time that is set apart to do this. Those of us who have children who are older are very conscious. And I would be so bold as to say I speak on behalf of many parents here in that situation, that we look back and we say, oh, how many opportunities we missed. How I would have done it differently if I could do it again? Of course, we can. But at least we can advise those who have the opportunity. If your children are still little, they're babies, they're preschool, young primary, you still have the opportunity to not make the mistakes some of us have made. We need to set aside those times where we can do what Paul is saying that he as a father did.

[26 : 24] Well, we need to draw things to a close. The final things we're going to say, we're going to just say very, very briefly. But I would ask and I would challenge you this morning. Christian fathers, I begin with fathers especially, are you doing this? And if you are doing this, if you are encouraging, comforting, urging your children to walk lives worthy of God, you are doing God's work. Because these are God-like activities. Our Heavenly Father is the one God supremely who encourages, who comforts, who urges. But if you are not, then be clear that it is a dereliction of your God-appointed duty to fail to do these things. Indeed, it's a dereliction of your God-appointed duty if you delegate these tasks to the mom. Say, oh, well, mother can do that. She can encourage, she can comfort, she can urge. That's not my job. Well, Paul says, and God says, it is your job. You have been given by God spiritual leadership in your home. And that involves encouraging, comforting, urging your children to walk worthy of God. And thank God if you have a wife who helps you and accompanies you in performing these duties. A father's reward. What is a father's reward? Well, very briefly as we return to the passage, what was the outcome of Paul's encouraging, comforting, and urging? Well, we see in the following verse two verbs that answer that question. What does he say about the Thessalonians? What did they do with what he gave to them? Well, we're told that they received the Word of God and they accepted the Word of God. And there's a progression there. The Thessalonians listened, they heard, they understood, but they went beyond that.

They actually accepted it and took it for themselves and responded to it and indeed sought to live and did live lives worthy of God. And that really is what I'm coming to with regarding a father's reward.

This was Paul's greatest reward. That he could look on now from afar and say, you responded. You listened to me. It made a difference in your lives. You are living lives worthy of God. That is my greatest reward. It was my greatest desire and it is also my greatest reward. And we close, perhaps in the most appropriate way, by noticing that there's also a father's gratitude. In all of this, Paul is conscious that the one he is to thank is God.

In verse 13, he says, and we also thank God continually because when you receive the Word of God, when you heard from us, you accepted it and so on. Yes, Paul fulfilled his duty, but he's conscious that their reception of it, their response to it was thanks to God's working in them. And he thanks God. He thanks God continually for the manner in which they responded.

And I pray that all parents here this morning, but especially those parents whose children will be baptized. I pray that you will all, that we will all have both the cause and the desire to thank God continually for our children as they would walk worthy of God. Let us pray.