

The Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Paul's Integrity in Ministry

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in this passage is the nature of faithful gospel stewardship and the motives that God requires of those who handle His truth. Paul presents the gospel as a trust, something he was “approved by God” to be “entrusted with,” and he insists that the one who carries it answers to God rather than to the crowd. This guards a treasured conviction in our churches: that ministry is accountable to God and to His word, not to popularity, profit, or position. The passage also closes with a key phrase, God “calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (v. 12), which affirms that God’s kingdom is a present reality into which believers are even now being called, not merely a future earthly hope.

At the same time, this passage is deeply formational. Paul is not only defending his integrity; he is modeling a love that the whole church is meant to imitate. The maternal and paternal images, the willingness to share his very self, the refusal to use people, all of these press on the student’s own motives and relationships. The aim is to help students examine whose approval they live for and to grow into the kind of self-giving love Paul embodies.

So aim at both targets this week. Help students grasp that the gospel is a sacred trust to be handled with integrity before God, and stir them toward a love for others that is gentle, honest, costly, and free of self-seeking. Let the lesson search motives and warm hearts at the same time.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says that he and his companions “have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel,” and so they speak “not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts” (v. 4). What does it mean that the gospel is a trust we are given, and how should that reshape the motives of everyone who handles God’s word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the word “entrusted.” Paul uses the language of stewardship: the gospel is not his own possession to market or modify, but a trust placed in his hands by God. Help students feel the weight of this. A steward does not own what he manages; he answers to the owner. This is the controlling idea behind Paul’s whole defense.

Draw out the consequence Paul himself draws: because the gospel comes from God, the one who carries it speaks “not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.” The audience

that matters is an audience of One. God sees beneath the surface to the motives, so the steward's first concern is faithfulness, not applause.

Widen the application beyond preachers. Every Christian has been entrusted with the gospel in some measure, in how we speak of Christ, teach our children, and represent the truth to others. The temptation to soften or reshape the message to win approval is universal. Faithfulness means handling God's word with care and courage even when it is unpopular.

Connect this to the broader New Testament conviction that Scripture is our authority and must not be tampered with (2 Corinthians 4:2). The steward adjusts himself to the message, not the message to the audience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as a sacred trust from God, to be guarded and handled faithfully (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)
- Accountability to God rather than to human approval as the governing motive of ministry
- God as the one who tests and knows the heart, not merely outward performance (1 Samuel 16:7)
- The refusal to alter or soften God's word to suit an audience (2 Corinthians 4:2)
- Every believer's stewardship of the truth in their own sphere of influence

Discussion Prompts

- What changes when you realize you answer ultimately to God, not to the crowd?
- Where are God's people tempted to reshape the message to make it more popular?
- What does it mean in practice to handle the gospel as a trust rather than a possession?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul deliberately refused flattery and the approval of the crowd. In what specific situations are you most tempted to shape your words or behavior to win people's approval rather than God's? What would change if you lived for His approval there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Paul's refusal of flattery into a personal mirror. People-pleasing is one of the most respectable and least confronted sins among sincere believers, because it often looks like kindness. Help students see the difference between genuinely loving others and being controlled by the need for their approval.

Give concrete arenas where the temptation bites: staying silent about convictions to avoid friction, exaggerating or shading the truth to look better, saying yes when we should say no,

tailoring our spiritual lives to impress. Naming specifics helps students locate the pattern in themselves.

Point to the freedom on the other side. Living for God's approval, the approval of the One who already knows us fully and loves us in Christ, frees us from the exhausting work of managing everyone's opinion of us. Galatians 1:10 makes the stakes plain: bondage to human approval is incompatible with being a servant of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- People-pleasing as a subtle form of the fear of man (Proverbs 29:25)
- The freedom that comes from living for God's settled approval in Christ (Galatians 1:10)
- The difference between loving others and being controlled by their opinions
- Integrity as the alignment of inner motive and outward word

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to perform for others' approval?
- How does knowing God already approves you in Christ change that temptation?
- What is one situation this week where you can choose God's approval over people's?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verses 3 through 6 Paul lists what his ministry was not: it did not spring from error, impurity, or deceit, and it never used flattery, a pretext for greed, or the pursuit of human glory. What does this catalog reveal about the kind of integrity God requires of those who carry His truth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have students read verses 3 through 6 slowly and notice that Paul defends himself by listing absences. His message did not come from error (it was true), impurity (his motives were clean), or deceit (he did not manipulate). He did not use flattery, a cloak for greed, or the pursuit of glory from people. The sheer length of the list shows how carefully Paul guarded his integrity.

Help students see that integrity is multidimensional. It involves the truth of what we say, the purity of why we say it, and the honesty of how we say it. A person can be doctrinally correct yet manipulative, or sincere yet careless with truth. Paul insists on all of it together.

Apply this especially to those who handle God's word in any capacity. The stakes are high precisely because the message is God's. To wrap the gospel in flattery or to use it for personal gain is to misrepresent the God who sent it. Faithful handling of truth requires clean hands and a clean heart.

Note the contrast with the false teachers and traveling philosophers of Paul's day, who often did exactly what Paul refused to do. Paul's integrity itself was part of his witness; the manner of his ministry matched its message.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integrity as truthfulness, purity of motive, and honesty of method together
- The danger of using religious language to manipulate or to gain (2 Peter 2:3)
- The harmony between the messenger's character and the message's truth
- Guarding the gospel from being twisted for personal advantage

Discussion Prompts

- Which item on Paul's list do you think is the hardest to keep clean, and why?
- How can good doctrine still be delivered with bad motives?
- Why does the manner of our witness matter as much as its content?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul could honestly say he never wore a "mask" to cover greed (v. 5). Are there places where your outward behavior hides an inward motive you would rather not admit? What would honesty before "God who tests our hearts" look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses gently into the gap between outward behavior and inward motive. Paul could say he never wore a mask over greed. Most of us cannot say that so easily. The aim is honest reflection before the God who tests hearts, not self-condemnation.

Help students understand that hidden motives are not always dramatic. They can be as ordinary as serving in order to be noticed, giving in order to be thanked, or helping in order to feel superior. Bringing these into the light before God is the path to freedom, not shame.

Encourage a practice of honesty in prayer. Since God already sees the heart, confession is not informing Him of something new; it is agreeing with what He already knows and inviting Him to cleanse it. This is how the Spirit purifies our motives over time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between reputation (what others see) and integrity (who we are before God)
- God's searching knowledge of the heart as an invitation to honesty, not fear (Psalm 139:23-24)
- Confession as agreeing with God about hidden motives
- The Spirit's ongoing work of purifying our intentions

Discussion Prompts

- Where might your outward behavior be hiding an inward motive?
- What makes it hard to be honest with God about our motives?
- How can confessing hidden motives actually bring freedom?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul compares himself to a nursing mother caring for her children (v. 7) and a father encouraging his children (vv. 11–12). What do these two family images teach us about how the gospel is meant to be carried to people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reaches for two family images, and both repay close attention. The nursing mother (v. 7) speaks of tenderness, patience, and self-giving nourishment; she gladly gives of her own body and rest for the child's good. The father (vv. 11–12) speaks of personal, individual attention, encouraging, comforting, and urging each child toward maturity.

Help students see that gospel truth is meant to be carried in this relational, nurturing way. Truth without tenderness can wound; tenderness without truth cannot nourish. Paul holds them together. He spoke hard truths, but he carried them in arms of love.

Apply this to how the congregation handles one another, especially newer or struggling believers. The church is a family, and the family images here set the tone for how we are to treat each other: gently, patiently, individually, always aiming at growth.

Note too that both images involve cost. Mothers and fathers pour themselves out for their children with little thought of return. This anticipates the next verses, where Paul speaks of sharing his very self.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Truth and tenderness held together in the care of souls (Ephesians 4:15)
- The church as a family marked by gentleness and personal care (1 Timothy 5:1–2)
- Spiritual nurture aimed at maturity, not mere information transfer
- The self-giving cost of caring for others as a parent cares for a child

Discussion Prompts

- Why do truth and tenderness need to travel together?
- Which image, the nursing mother or the encouraging father, challenges you more?
- How can our congregation grow in this kind of family care?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of someone God has placed in your care or influence, a child, a younger believer, a friend, a coworker. Does your manner with them look more like the gentleness and encouragement Paul describes, or like something harsher or more distant? What is one way you could grow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves the family imagery into the student's own relationships. Each of us has people in our care or influence, and our manner with them either reflects Paul's gentleness or falls short of it. The goal is honest, hopeful self-assessment.

Encourage students to think of a specific person and a specific pattern. Is my default with my children impatience or encouragement? Is my manner with a struggling friend gentle or dismissive? Concreteness keeps this from staying abstract.

Then point toward one growth step. Perhaps it is more listening, more patience, more deliberate encouragement, or a hard truth finally spoken in love. Spiritual formation happens as we bring our actual relationships under the pattern of Christ's gentleness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our manner toward others as an expression of Christ's character in us
- Gentleness and encouragement as marks of mature love
- The call to grow in how we treat those in our care
- Patience as a fruit of the Spirit worked out in real relationships (Galatians 5:22)

Discussion Prompts

- Whom did you picture, and what is your default manner with them?
- What would more of Paul's gentleness look like in that relationship?
- What is one step you can take this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says he was "ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (v. 8), and that he worked night and day so as not to burden anyone. What does this teach about the real cost and shape of genuine Christian love and ministry?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 8 is the emotional center of the passage: Paul shared “not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.” Help students feel how striking this is. Paul did not minister at arm’s length, dropping off truth and moving on. He gave himself, his time, his affection, his very life, because the people had become dear to him.

Pair this with the detail that he worked night and day so as not to burden anyone. Genuine love is costly. Paul refused to make his ministry comfortable at others’ expense; instead he absorbed the cost himself. This is the shape of Christlike love, which always involves self-giving.

Draw the line to Jesus, who did not merely deliver a message but gave Himself for us. Christian love follows that pattern. It is incarnational; it shows up in person, shares life, and bears cost. A faith that only ever loves from a safe distance has not yet learned this verse.

Apply it to the congregation. Real fellowship is more than attendance; it is the sharing of lives. Encourage students to consider what it would mean to give not just resources or advice but themselves to one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christlike love as self-giving, sharing life and not merely information (John 15:13)
- The costliness of genuine ministry and fellowship
- Incarnational care: showing up in person and sharing life, following Christ’s pattern
- Refusing to make our love comfortable at others’ expense

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between sharing the gospel and sharing yourself?
- Where have you experienced someone sharing their very life with you?
- What makes self-giving love so costly, and so powerful?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul gave not just truth but himself, and he did it at real personal cost. Where is God inviting you to move beyond convenient, arm’s-length care and actually share your life with someone? What is holding you back?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to move from admiring Paul’s self-giving love to imitating it. Most of us prefer convenient, controlled forms of care that protect our time and comfort. Paul models something riskier: actually sharing life.

Help students identify what holds them back. Often it is fear of being burdened, fear of vulnerability, busyness, or self-protection. Naming the obstacle is the first step toward overcoming it.

Encourage one concrete move: opening a home, entering into someone's struggle, giving regular time to a younger believer, letting someone in. The Spirit forms us in love as we take real, costly steps toward real people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to move from arm's-length care to genuine sharing of life
- Self-protection and busyness as common obstacles to love
- Hospitality and presence as practical forms of self-giving (Romans 12:13)
- Love as something we do, at cost, not merely feel

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God inviting you to share your life, not just your resources?
- What is holding you back from that kind of love?
- What is one costly step toward someone this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says his whole aim was to urge them to “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (v. 12). What does this teach about the call of God, the nature of His kingdom, and the kind of life that fits a people who belong to it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson. Paul's entire aim was that his readers would “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” Three rich truths are packed here: God calls, God's kingdom is the realm into which He calls, and a worthy walk is the fitting response.

Address the kingdom carefully and clearly. Notice that Paul speaks of God calling believers into His kingdom as a present reality. The kingdom of God arrived with the ministry of Jesus and was established when His church began; Christ now reigns at the Father's right hand, and believers are even now brought under His rule (Colossians 1:13). Help students see that we are not merely waiting for a future earthly kingdom; we have already been called into God's reign in Christ, with its full glory yet to be revealed. Avoid any suggestion of a future earthly political kingdom; the emphasis is Christ reigning now over a people who belong to Him.

Unpack “a manner worthy of God.” This is not earning salvation but living consistently with the God who has claimed us. A people called into the King's realm are to live like the King's people,

holy, loving, and faithful. The indicative (God has called you) grounds the imperative (so walk worthily).

Note the gentle pastoral force of “his own kingdom and glory.” The God who calls us is taking us toward glory. The worthy walk is not a grim duty but the path of a people headed somewhere magnificent. Let this lift the students’ eyes.

Tie it back to the chapter: Paul’s costly, holy, loving ministry was itself an example of a walk worthy of God. He practiced what he urged.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as a present reality into which believers are called, with Christ reigning now (Mark 1:14–15; Colossians 1:13)
- God’s effective call through the gospel into His kingdom and glory
- A walk “worthy of God” as the fitting response to grace, not a means of earning it (Ephesians 4:1)
- The future revealing of the glory toward which God is leading His people (Romans 8:18)
- A caution against expecting a future earthly political kingdom rather than Christ’s present reign

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God has already called us into His kingdom?
- How does belonging to the King now shape the way we live?
- What would a walk “worthy of God” look like in your daily routine?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over Paul’s portrait of a life lived with integrity before God and in love for people. Name one specific way you sense Jesus wanting to reshape your motives or your relationships through this lesson, and what your first step will be.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the lesson toward personal response. Help students choose one specific thread, whether it is whose approval they live for, the integrity of their motives, or the costliness of their love, and let the Spirit press it home.

Encourage a concrete first step rather than a general resolution. Formation happens in specifics: a conversation to have, a motive to confess, a person to whom they will give their time.

Close by returning to the dignity of the call. The same God who tests our hearts has called us into His own kingdom and glory. We pursue integrity and love not to earn His favor but because we already belong to Him. Send students out encouraged toward a worthy walk.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal application as the goal of studying Scripture (James 1:22)
- The Spirit's work of pressing specific truth into specific lives
- Concrete first steps as the path of formation
- Living from our identity as people called into God's kingdom

Discussion Prompts

- What one truth from this passage is the Spirit pressing on you?
- What concrete first step will you take this week?
- How can this group encourage one another toward a worthy walk?