

WEEKLY REFLECTION

Church, do you also mourn when yet another of our leaders falls from grace?

Paul himself had not, but in chapter two of his first letter to the Thessalonians, he defends himself against the slander of others. Where some might seek to spread false teachings or share the gospel for the sake of personal gain, Paul emphasizes his motivation and his methods—he shares the good news to “please God[,] who tests our hearts” (2:4b), and he worked night and day whilst maintaining holy, righteous, and blameless conduct towards the church (v.9-10). His heart for God and for the church shines through: he describes how he was “gentle among [them], like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.” (v.7) He was “affectionately desirous” of them, and shared not only the “gospel of God but also [his] own [self]” with them, because they had become very dear to him. (v.8)

Church, make no mistake. Even as we mourn our fallen ones and hold our leaders to higher standards—and we *should* (1 Tim. 3:1-7), we understand how difficult and near-impossible the task before them is. Paul’s labor of love amongst the Thessalonians was not for the faint of heart. But even where he faced trials and suffering, he did so gladly, knowing that “suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” (Rom. 5:3-4) His love for God and for the Thessalonians allowed him to endure in the toughest of times, even in moments where the enemy himself was directly opposing and hindering him. (1 Thess. 2:18)

The question for us as believers is: are there moments where we have allowed the enemy to oppose and hinder us? Have we shied away from moments and people who could produce endurance, character, and hope in us? Do we hold ourselves as we hold our leaders to the same standard? Are we able to stand firm for the truth and Word of God, and all that it is?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

What are your thoughts regarding the image of the Church in society at large? What do you think we have been doing well, and what could be done better?

How does this relate to the recent phenomenon of Christian leaders and their fall from grace?

QUESTION TWO:

What are Paul's motives and methods, and where did he learn them from? (Consider Phil. 2:3-9; Eph. 5:2. 2 Cor. 5:14; and 1 Jn. 4:7-11)

What sort of impact did Paul's leadership have on his followers? What sort of behavior did it lead to?

QUESTION THREE:

It was heavily emphasized during the sharing on Sunday the importance of having people who know you well enough to lovingly hold you accountable, and to call you out in your struggle against sin.

What do you think are some of your "weak spots"? Do you have people in your life who are able to speak into those areas?

How might you practice this amongst the members of your life group? How can you commit to lovingly calling each other higher, especially when you see old habits resurface?