

Roots and Foundations

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[0:00] So, I want us to go back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. We're looking at that in the morning. Last week we saw that Paul wrote this letter to a young church plant. He and Paul Silas and Timothy had set up the church. They were church planters. They'd gone to Thessalonica and then they'd had to leave. And then Paul writes this letter, which Timothy, based on a report, has heard. And it's because the church is struggling in some ways. There's a lot of battles. There's a lot of difficulties. There's a lot of opposition. So Paul writes this letter to encourage them. And it's very important for us to remember that these letters that were written became part of God's Word, which remains living and vibrant and important for us. And I think one of the things that's really important for us as we look at a letter like this is it helps us to understand the Bible, understand why it's got authority, and understand our roots as a church as well. Because we know that roots matter, don't they?

They're important. Knowing our roots matter. We know that matters in our families as well, doesn't it? Sometimes it helps us to understand who we are, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. It does mould our belonging a little bit about what we've become. Some of you will know some of my... My dad was a minister. My grandfather was a Crofter fisherman in the West Highland of Scotland in Glenelgen in Skye. And many generations before that were Crofter fishermen in Skye. My mum's dad was also a minister in the free church, and he was brought up and plucked in in the West Coast. So you can see that my family background has moulded a little bit of what I am. Deep down, I'm still a bit of a Crofter, I guess, maybe somewhere along the lines. And that does mould who we are, and it moulds what we are. It mustn't bind us, and it mustn't imprison us, but it does help us to understand who we are. And that matters as well for us as a church. And what we do want to be aware of is making that background an idol in our lives, don't we, or an imprisonment. But it matters as a church as well. We're part of the free church of Scotland. It's a Presbyterian church. We've got Scottish theological roots. Our office bearers are confessional, and they stand by the standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith. And that moulds the kind of church we are as well, our roots. But what I want to do is I want you to go back much further to our roots as a New Testament church, as the church of Jesus Christ, because that's the most important roots that we have, both individually as members of Christ's church as Christians and also as a family of God together. Why we believe what we believe and what the foundation of that belief is, and how that should transform us as Christians, both as individuals and as a family together. So I want to look way beyond our denominational borders and beyond our local church borders and think of who we are as Christians, and why we are Christians the way we are, and the authority that we fall under as Christians.

Because when Paul wrote to Thessalonian church, he wasn't just writing to them, he was writing to us as well. And he's giving his God-given credentials for speaking with authority to both to them and by God's grace to us as well. So I'm going to look at two things. I'm going to look at his apostolic foundation, the authority he has, both his gospel authority and the authenticity of his life. And then look at how that foundation is an example and becomes an example to us in our lives as Christians, not just to take it or leave it, but to come under his authority as a delegated authority from Jesus. So Paul did this because there seemed to be in this young church lots of different teachers coming in and teaching heresy and bad mouthing Paul. And you don't want Paul and Silas and Timothy, they're just a bunch of nutters. Look, they've all left. Listen to what we are saying. And so there was all kinds of strange teaching coming into this early church. So Paul is wanting to give his credentials and remind this young church that he has come from, that the message he has is from God and it's authentic, both the authority he has and the way his own life has been changed, their lives have been changed by God. And that's important for us because a lot of people will ask us to say, well, why do you believe the Bible? Or why do you listen to what Paul says? You know, are you people just follow Paul or his old fashioned now? Why don't you follow someone else? And lots of apostles come around today and say, you've got something very authoritative to say. But Paul said, and we say, no, the authority

Paul had was given to him by God. And that remains important and significant for us today. That's why we believe the Bible and we accept the Bible because we believe it has been given to us by God. And I'm going to start with that, that Paul claims in verse 13 of this passage that is broken down for us that he is bringing a message from God. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. So that's an astonishing claim. Paul's making an astonishing claim. You probably read over that and didn't think about it. It's an astonishing claim.

Paul is saying, look, we've brought a message to you. It's not our own message. You accepted it as God's word. And that's exactly he's saying what it was. He says, we are specially commissioned, set apart by God as apostles to bring God's word to the New Testament church. They have His authority. There's these great words in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19 and 20. And the children's worksheet has got a little kind of visual of that as well.

[6:53] Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 19 and 20 where he says, if I can find it, yeah, so then you're no longer strangers and aliens, but you're fellow citizens with the saints. That's all of us today with God's members of God's household. Built on what? Built on what? It's built on the Saint Columbus, it's built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into the holy temple of the Lord. So there and here Paul is saying, look, I've got gospel authority because I'm an apostle and the apostles were the foundation of the New Testament church. They were given a unique role. They were those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus, who had been with Jesus, Paul himself. Uniquely so, as we're told if you read 2 Corinthians 12, he received the message especially by revelation from God and the apostles. John himself in 1 John 1 chapter 1 says, this is that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, he says, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon, we have touched concerning the Word of life. And he's reminding them and he's reminding us that the Bible isn't just a bunch of books that's been written by godly people, it is given to the apostles as the foundation of the New Testament church. And Paul knew that. And so when Paul wrote this letter, he knew that he was writing the Word of God, not just his own thoughts. So the Bible doesn't need to be updated because it's God's revelation for us. Yes, I know we need to contextualize it, but we don't need to update it. The apostles were given this derived authority and we, when we come to church, when you read your Bible in the morning, when you read it any other day, when you look at it online, whatever it is you're reading, the living Word of God, God's message for you. That's why many of you can say, as

I can say, that we've gone to the Bible sometimes and we felt God's right there with us, that He has spoken into my heart and into my situation. And it's clearly a living, breathing Word for us. So the apostles had this great foundation that, or they were this great foundation for the church with the authority of God. And that authority was backed up by the authenticity of their lives. And Paul is arguing that here in Thessalonians. So he's saying, look, we've been given the authority of God, we're apostles of God, and you've seen that our lives have changed. And I think he's doing that because he's comparing himself with some of the false teachers that had come into the church in Thessalonica. He said, their lives have not been transformed. So verses 3 to 6, he speaks about that. He says, you know, our appeal doesn't spring from error or impurity. We don't want to try to deceive you. We've been approved by God and trusted with the gospel. We're not here to please men. We don't want to use flattery. We're not greedy for gain. So he's explaining that their lives back up the message that they've been given by God. They're not tricking or manipulating or using flattery. In other words, they're not con artists. They're the genuine article accountable to God. They're there to please God and to bring His message transformed by grace and changed by grace. Now that is really important truth. Because what God is saying in that is God is saying that His primary way of revealing Himself to us is through people whose lives have been transformed. Now that goes on to affect all of us in our lives. Paul is saying that the truth that I'm giving you is truth that has transformed my life. It's truth that's embedded in my existence. It's truth that has lived out in my life. It's truth that God has entrusted with me and my life has been transformed because of that. And we have to take this as well. That Paul's authority comes from his life being transformed.

And you know Paul's a great example of that, isn't he? Because he was murdering Christians and God changed his life and changed his heart in an ongoing way. Now there's a very important principle there that the revelation of truth is much more than me standing here and preaching to you from the Bible. It's much more than just imparting facts. It's much more than just a brain dump onto you. It's much more than you just saying yes to some moral truths and living in a certain way. But the truth of Jesus Christ is empowered when it comes through lives that have been changed by Jesus Christ, by hearts that have been changed, by the eyes of our hearts being enlightened. It's not just that, you know, take this, read that and see what it's like and walk away. That is not what the truth is. And we'll see that throughout our understanding of the apostolic leadership that we have here in this passage.

The apostles were people who were taking the truth of God's Word and were living it in that family context and loving it and loving the people they were with. They were ambassadors, they weren't academics, they were not just passing on a formula, they weren't scientific, they were active, authentic, living, breathing Christians. And so we find when we live the truth or when we seek to share the gospel with people, its authenticity, its power is made known by our own changed lives. And that's so terribly important that we recognize that, that we recognize that people's lives will be changed because our lives have been changed.

So that is what gave them the authenticity. I'm going to say a little bit more about that because it's very important to Paul that the found, it wasn't just that they had a foundation and that's our foundation for our New Testament church. But that foundation was lived out by their ongoing example. What we have in these verses is a brilliant example of leadership in the church. Both formal and informal as I was saying last week and 90% of you here have an informal leadership role, probably 100% of us have some kind of informal leadership role in our lives and in our church. And the important example is, so if you've wondered what is the relevance up till now and you thought, well, okay, this is a bit dry. Remember from now on, if you're a Christian, your life is up for being imitated. And that's hugely important.

[14:33] In verse 6 of chapter 1, Paul says that, you became imitators of us and of the Lord. And then in chapter 2, in verse 14, it says that you became imitators of the church of God and Jesus Christ. Very important truths there, that our lives are examples and the apostles' lives were examples. And that's hugely significant for us because we are to imitate our apostolic founders and we're also to imitate our leaders. And people are to imitate you as a Christian and you are to imitate other Christians. Now, that's a great, that's an important thing, isn't it? Because we talked about family before. And sometimes what we learn from our family is how we live. We imitate them, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. Now, in church, our lives are imitable for good or for bad. Because whether we recognize it or not, our lives are being, are modeling our Christian understanding. And we need to think about what that looks like. And Paul recognized that importance. And so there was two things about Paul that he speaks about here. He speaks about his character and he speaks about his conduct. Okay? And we can broaden that all to our lives as Christians. In verse 12, he says another astonishing thing. Previously, he talks about speaking the word of God. And then in verse 12, he says that we are, sorry, in verse 10, he says, you are witnesses and

God also how holy, righteous and blameless was our conduct towards you as believers. And then he goes on verse 12 to say that they walked in a manner worthy of God. Wow! So all you can say that is he called himself holy, righteous and blameless. And what does that mean? Does that mean he was just picture perfect? Does it mean that he just lived his wonderful, holy, blameless and righteous life? What really, does that stand, are you looking at that stand and say, well, I certainly can't attain to that. I can't stand before the mirror and say that, let alone stand before God and say that. Well, let's think about what that means. It really simply means that he understands the gospel. He understands that there is one who lived a holy, blameless and righteous life, but lived it for him.

And when he put his trust in Jesus, he was covered in that holy, righteous, blameless living. Now if I could see spiritually today, clothing, spiritual clothing, I would see everyone in the congregation here who has taken Christ as Savior. If I could see, I would see that clothing covering every Christian. So every Christian is holy, blameless and righteous because they are covered in the righteousness of Jesus. And Jesus has taken our sins and paid for that on the cross. So it's a recognition that the gospel enables us to stand before God as holy, righteous and blameless because of Jesus, but it also is speaking about someone whose heart is right before God, who recognizes and knows that he is constantly dealing with the sins that bring him back to God, that come to God for need for independence and forgiveness and confessing sins and humbly living independence on God. That's what it means to be holy, righteous and blameless, is to trust in Jesus and it means to obey Jesus because we love Him and serve Him. And when we fail to obey Him, we go back to Him for forgiveness and for renewal and for a new start and for a new beginning because He loves us and because He always accepts us and because He always forgives us.

So Paul had this life and it was read by everyone and it was imitated by people, holy, righteous and blameless. Which of us can say that? We should all be able to say that if we understand the gospel because it's not a proud statement, it's a humble statement recognizing Jesus.

And his character had this authenticity and had this motivation that he was there to please God because God was worthy. In other words, he's setting himself apart from the kind of false teachers that were setting themselves up in Thessalonica, were there for money or were there for popularity or for there to just twist the gospel. And he said, no, look, I'm not here to please you. I'm not here, I'm not motivated by anything that might be impure but God is worth it. God is worthy and I'm here to please Him because of who He is. And it's that recognition, a great recognition that we serve God not to be seen, we serve God not to tick legalistic boxes, we serve God not somehow to earn His favor but because He's worthy. He's simply worthy. He is worthy of everything we are and everything we do.

[20:26] I'm reading a really good book just now. I don't read very much. That's something to do with my crofting background. But I'm reading a really good book just now and it's called Gay Girl, Good God. Read it. If you have time, read that book. It's a spectacular book because that's a girl who recognize that God is worthy in the battles and the struggles that she's facing, the same sex attraction. Unbelievably insightful, deep recognition of the worthiness of God. And that is hugely important that we serve God and follow God because we recognize that He is worthy and recognize He is glorious.

So foundation by example in character and also in conduct and in verses 7 to 12, he speaks about the way he lived as an apostle among them. Now this is great as well. He talks in verse 7, we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her children and then he goes on to say that he was like a father to them as well. So we've got this family motif that Paul is using here to describe the love and the care and the conduct he had within the church, a family motif. Now I'm going to speak just for a moment to the men here. Okay, the macho men, strong men, the men who are emotionally unable to express themselves very well and I'm including myself in that because that's what we're like, aren't we? We're not that good at expressing our emotions. And when the preacher starts talking about things like opening your heart and being honest with one another and being vulnerable, you just kick back and say, oh no, I'm a real man. I can't do these things. I'm not good at that. Leave that for the girls and the women because that's what's in touch, they're in touch with their emotions much more and much more sensitive to that. And here's Paul.

Here's Paul who was whipped and beaten up and imprisoned and left for dead and shipwrecked. He was a man's man and very often he was writing these letters in prison. And what does he use? He says, I was gentle among you like a mother nursing her baby on her breast. That's what he's saying here. He said, the incredible bond for a mother with their nursing child, that's how I cared for you. Now that's real manliness. That's real tough, hard manliness.

Being able to say that, that's a real man because he recognized that gentleness is controlled strength. It's that giving of ourselves in gentle and loving motherly concern for one another. That is the kind of apostle. Is that the image you have of the apostle Paul? Probably not. Particularly from a non-Christian background, Paul would be called the great misogynist, wouldn't he, for all the things he said about, allegedly said about the role of women and things like that. But yet here we have him recognizing so powerfully the gentleness of being a leader within the family of God, like a mother with a nursing baby. What is a more intimate picture than that? But he also uses the picture of a father as well, for you know how verse 11, like a father with his children, we exhorted each of you, encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God. Parental oversight and love and care and protection. You know that picture of good parents, isn't it? I know sometimes you might have had bad parents and difficult relationships and broken lives and abandoned fathers or distant mothers, it may be. But in that picture of great family bond and love, there's this utterly sacrificial, caring, loving, protecting, exhorting, you know, like that father, a picture of encouraging you, exhorting you. When I think of that picture, I think of my own kids when they were wee, maybe we were at the beach or something like that, and there would be rocks to climb on and one of them would stand high up on a rock and I'd say, come on then, come on, jump. Jump into my arms, maybe 10, 15 feet and you could see them swithering.

Were they going to do, my dad wasn't going to walk away, you know, the left of the mountain, okay, you make yourself, it's not going to happen, is it? He's going to catch them. You're just exhorting them to take that risk, exhorting them to trust. And that happens a million times in our parental role and you may remember it as a child with your parents. But there's that family bond of love and commitment and of closeness. That's the picture of the church.

[26:08] That's what St. Columbus is encouraged and invited and authoritatively demanded to be like by God. He says, that's the kind of church I want you to be. That's the kind of leaders, elders, that's the kind of elders I want you to be, deacons, that's the kind of deacons I want. People who run the Cresce, people who run Sunday School, people who are in a group of women's pastoral team, that's the kind of leaders, informal, informal, that's the kind of Christians I want you to be, a family together in that committed and loving and forgiving and sacrificial and life-transforming way. Do you see what I mean? Do you see that being in the free church is not about being reformed primarily, it's not about having good understanding of the Bible as it were on its own. That's not what sets us apart, that's not orthodoxy. What is orthodoxy is taking that reform teaching and the apostolic message and the truth of God's Word and incarnating it, living it out, being changed, being transformed by the gospel because that's the apostolic picture. And that's the leadership model and that is the family community model we have because why? Well, it's God's authority, but also that's what you imitate or it's we imitate and that's what we're to imitate because if we're not imitating that, we're imitating something else, something lesser, something more formal maybe, something more distant, something more critical, something where we find fault easily, where we're not committed in a parental love, where we critique and stand a distance, a don't become involved. Maybe it's because of our family experience naturally, maybe because we've had difficult times, maybe we don't trust. That book that I was speaking about speaks a lot about trust, a whole lot about trust and how difficult it can be to trust people if your trust has been broken many times and in many ways. And we've got to remember that as churches, when people come into our churches, they're maybe scared of the building, they're maybe scared of the community, they may be scared of the whole idea of church because their trust has been broken so many times both in life and maybe in church. And we need to work hard to regain people's trust by loving and serving and following them, following Christ by loving them. That's not easy, is it? You remember how tough it was for your parents? You remember maybe yourselves today here as young parents, how tough it can be? There are some glorious things about having children but you know how tough it is as well. You've experienced that but we keep on going. We don't trade them in, we don't give up, we don't fail, we keep loving and serving and in grace we can do that because

God gives us the strength to do it. We don't rely on ourselves, we don't excuse failure, we don't excuse the need to forgive others, we don't excuse bad behavior but we seek by God's grace to have that authentic character motivated by God's worth that produces the conduct that is, that we are confident people will imitate because as they imitate us, they are imitating Jesus Christ. And I finished with this last verse. I've kind of jumped a little bit from the different verses so forgive me for that. It's the way it fitted in with the sermon really but I think verse 8 in many ways is a summary of this whole section, might even be a summary of the whole book, letter. I think it's a terrible, I shouldn't say a terrible, I don't think it's the best translation I think it's in the ESV it's a little bit kind of old worldly and old fashioned, I don't think it's the best.

So being affectionately desirous of you, I mean whoever says that now, oh I affectionately am affectionately desirous of you, it's not really the common tongue, it's not really what we would say, we would probably say because I love you very much, I love you very much.

Because of that, he says, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves because you'd become very dear to us. That is a great summary of what I've been trying to say, I might, I should have started with that and maybe I should have just read that and just said amen. But that is the model that God has given for us because Paul is a foundational apostle and the church is built on the apostles foundation and that's the kind of people he wants us to be. He says, he wants us to be people who love each other so very much that we share the gospel with each other when we go for our walks with Sparkle sisters or whatever else it is and we share with them our very lives, why? Because they become dear to us. Be honest with yourself this morning, I hope you are as I need to be. Can you say that if you're a visitor with your home church connection, maybe you're not a Christian and you're wondering what on earth the gospel is all about, I hope that we've made a little bit clearer what it is to be loved by Christ and to serve Him.

As members and people involved in St. Columbus, would that summarize how you understand your commitment to St. Columbus? That we share with each other not just the gospel but we share with each other our very lives because people have become so dear to us. That's a great model and you know what, it's a great model for discipleship. I think it's an even better model for evangelism. We share the gospel with people because people are dear to us, because we love them and because we're willing to share our lives with them. Why is the gospel not effective? Why is our evangelism not effective? May it be something to do with that? That we are not sharing our lives with them to the extent that they know how dear we are, they are to us. And how dear the gospel is and how worthy God is to us. We're not known. We're not a book that's known and read or it may be a book that people are judging simply by its cover because that's all they see. But we never open it up. Do we open up our lives to people so that they see who we are and see that we're transformed and see the gospel in all its power transforming us to be authentic Christians and attractive at that level. I hope so. Amen. Let's pray. Father God, help us to live our lives in such a way that is holy and blameless and righteous, not in ourselves, not because we're better than anyone, but because we're covered in Your holiness and righteousness and perfection.

[33 : 46] And because we come and recognize our need of You changing our hearts, transforming our hearts from the inside out, dealing with our sin and the just wrath that we face if we stay apart from You. And Lord, help us to see and live that and express that and share that with others in our lives. We pray for people to become Christians in our circles of influence that people would see, that the gospel is coming with not just in word only, but in the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit. We ask that in Jesus' name. Amen.