

Infants, Nursing Mother, and Father: Paul's Portrayal of a Pastor¹

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Prelude

The task of writing a paper to honor the New Testament emeriti at Calvin Theological Seminary is a daunting one. How can one compose a paper that possesses the grammatical and textual skills of Bastiaan VanElderen, the theological insight and wisdom of David Holwerda, and the scholarly grace and humor of Andrew Bandstra? Furthermore, how can one present such a paper when these three scholars—all former professors of mine—are here to evaluate first-hand whether the legacy of their accumulated 123 years of teaching is correctly being passed on to the next generation or if their pearls of wisdom have instead been thrown before the swine? As challenging as my task may be, it is one that I carry out with joy and profound gratitude to God, for today I join all those gathered here to give thanks to our heavenly Father for three men who faithfully served both their God and their church by passing on the truths of the gospel; three men who demonstrated clearly throughout their careers the testimony of Paul in his second letter to Timothy: “For this gospel I was appointed . . . a teacher” (2 Tim. 1:11).

Introduction

What image captures well the role of a minister of the gospel? What picture portrays properly how pastors ought to think of themselves and how they ought to act within their congregation? In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul makes use of three striking family metaphors to describe his mission-founding work in the Thessalonian church: that of an infant, a nursing mother, and a father. The apostle's purpose in employing these three metaphors is not primarily to provide an example for contemporary ministers to follow. Nevertheless, the portrayal of himself as infant, nursing mother, and father provides pastors today with three powerful pictures of how they ought to view their calling. More specifically, these three family metaphors suggest that ministers of the gospel

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ought to conduct themselves in such a way that they are as innocent as infants, as loving as a nursing mother, and as authoritative as a father.

The Historical Context of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The three family metaphors and the function that each one has in Paul's larger argument of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 can only be understood properly in light of the passage's specific historical context. In other words, to cite familiar vocabulary of one of our honorees, we need to examine first this passage's *Sitz im Leben*.

An Apologetic or Parenetic Function?

Until relatively recent times a discussion of the historical context of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 could have been brief, as virtually all scholars agreed that Paul in this passage was defending himself. Some claimed that Paul was under attack from *inside* the church, from either Judaizers,² Gnostics,³ Spiritual Enthusiasts,⁴ or Millenarianists.⁵ The majority, under the influence of Acts 17:1-9, saw the charges coming from *outside* the church, namely, from unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica.⁶ While scholars debated the exact identity of Paul's opponents in Thessalonica, they did agree that Paul in 2:1-12 was defending himself from

²William Neil, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), xv-xvi; 33-47; William Hendricksen, *Exposition of I and II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955), 11.

³Walter Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, trans. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 128-318; Wolfgang Harnisch, *Exchatologische Existenz. Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Sachanliegen von I Thessalonicher 4, 13-5, 11*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 110 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973).

⁴Wilhelm E. Lütgert, "Die Volkommenen im Philipperbrief und die Enthusiasten in Thessalonich," *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* 13, no.6 (1909): 547-654; Robert Jewett, "Enthusiastic Radicalism and the Thessalonian Correspondence," *SBL 1972 Proceedings*, 2 vols., ed. Lane C. McGaughey (n.p.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 1.181-232.

⁵Wayne A. Meeks, "Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity," *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism. Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1983), 687-705; Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Foundations and Facets: New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 159-78.

⁶E.g., George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1908), xxxi-xxxii; Kirsopp Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul: Their Motive and Origin* (London: Rivingtons, 1911), 76; James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 9-10; Alfred Plummer, *A Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians* (London: Robert Scott, 1918), xvii-xviii; Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 22; Traugott Holtz, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 13 (Zürich: Benziger, 1986), 65-66.

actual accusations and that the function of this passage was apologetic. Thus, in the late 1960s, Walter Schmithals could say with justification: "On this point the exegetes from the time of the Fathers down to the last century have never been in doubt."⁷

The past three decades, however, have witnessed a paradigmatic shift among biblical scholars concerning the function of 2:1-12. Contemporary scholars have been influenced by striking parallels in language and thought between Paul in this passage and the orator-turned-cynic philosopher Dio Chrysostom (A.D. 40-120) in his Alexandrian oration (*Oration*, 32, dated between A.D. 108-112).⁸ In this speech, Dio raises a number of problems with the actions and motives of certain Cynic philosophers and contrasts this with the characteristics found in a true philosopher. Because Dio in this speech was not responding to any specific accusations made against him personally, many have assumed that Paul in 2:1-12 was also not defending himself against actual accusations. Instead, the antithetical statements of this passage should be viewed as traditional topos and vocabulary of the philosopher depicting himself. The vast majority of contemporary scholars have concluded, therefore, that the function of 2:1-12 is not apologetic but parenetic: Paul is presenting his behavior and that of his fellow missionaries as a model for the Thessalonian believers to follow.⁹

Despite this new consensus, there are compelling grounds for viewing the primary function of 2:1-12 as defensive or apologetic. I have presented elsewhere an extensive defense for the apologetic function of this passage and there is no need to repeat that evidence here.¹⁰ Instead, I must be content sim-

⁷Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, 151.

⁸The first to argue for this background was Abraham Malherbe, "'Gentle As a Nurse'. The Cynic Background to I Thess ii," *NovT* 12, no. 2 (1970): 203-17, although, as Malherbe himself notes, he developed to a greater degree the earlier claims of Martin Dibelius (*An die Thessalonicher I, II* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1937], 7-11) concerning the Cynic background of 1 Thessalonians 2.

⁹So, e.g., Wolfgang Stegemann, "Anlass und Hintergrund der Abfassung von 1 Thes 2,1-12," in *Theologische Brosamen für Lothar Steiger*, ed. Gerhard Freund and Ekkehard Stegemann (Heidelberg: Esrint, 1985), 397-416; Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 91; Abraham Smith, "The Social and Ethical Implications of the Pauline Rhetoric in I Thessalonians," (Ph.D. Diss., Vanderbilt University, 1990), 78-79; Frank Witt Hughes, "The Rhetoric of 1 Thessalonians," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 101; Johannes Schoon-Janssen, *Umstrittene 'Apologien' in den Paulsbrieffen: Studien zur rhetorischen Situation des 1. Thessalonicherbriefes, des Galaterbriefes und des Philippenerbriefes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 39-65; Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 88-89; Steve Walton, "What Has Aristotle to Do with Paul? Rhetorical Criticism and 1 Thessalonians," *TynBul* 46, no. 2 (1995): 229-50; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1998), 5-6; Michael W. Holmes, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 60; Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 79-81, 134.

¹⁰Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "An Apology for the Apologetic Function of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12," *JSNT* 68, no. 4 (1997): 73-99. See also Todd D. Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and its Neighbours* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 137-49.

ply to assert that (1) distinctive features of the thanksgiving section in 1:2-10, (2) the parallel function of the *apostolic Parousia* in 2:17-3:10, (3) the unique features of the antithetical statements in 2:1-12 as well as their frequency, and (4) the repeated appeals to the Thessalonians' first-hand knowledge all indicate that modern interpreters have too quickly abandoned the long-held view that Paul in this passage is in some real sense defending himself.¹¹ Although not all these factors are equally significant, they have the cumulative effect of legitimizing the claim that the primary function of this passage is defensive or apologetic. If a parenetic or hortatory function is present in 2:1-12, it must be secondary or subordinate to Paul's primary purpose of defending himself.¹²

The Identity of Paul's Opponents and Their Charges

The apologetic function of 2:1-12 leads to two distinct but related questions: (1) From whom is Paul defending himself? (2) What is the character or content of the charges to which Paul responds? With respect to the first question, it is clear that Paul's opponents come from *outside* the church. The good report about the church from Timothy referred to in 3:6, the exemplary character of the Thessalonian believers' life (1:6-7), Paul's description of them as "our hope and joy and crown of boasting" at Christ's return (2:19-20), the positive status of the church implied in the repeated command to "increase even more" with respect to proper conduct (4:1b, 10b), the frequent use of the term "brothers," as well as the affectionate tone of the letter as a whole, make it impossible to believe that Paul was facing attack from believers inside the church.

When one considers the possible opponents outside the church, the best candidate is the *συμφυλετοί*—the "fellow citizens"—explicitly mentioned by Paul in 2:14. There is clear evidence both within the Thessalonian letters and without that the predominantly Gentile church of Thessalonica experienced significant opposition and affliction because of their newfound faith (1:6b; 2:2b; 2:14-15; 3:1-5; 2 Thess. 1:4-7; see also 2 Cor. 8:1-2; Acts 17:5-7, 13) and that the source of this abuse was their fellow citizens (2:14). This persecution

¹¹This conclusion is still valid regardless of whether Paul is responding to actual accusations raised against him or to potential charges that he feared might be made. In either situation, the function of 2:1-12 remains the same: Paul in this passage is attempting to defend himself and so reestablish the trust and confidence of his readers. As Aristotle observed: "One way of removing prejudice is to make use of the arguments by which one may clear oneself from disagreeable suspicion; *for it makes no difference whether this suspicion has been openly expressed or not*" (*Rhetoric*, 3.15.1).

¹²Such a secondary parenetic function is recognized by Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 61; Bruce C. Johanson, *To All the Brethren: A Text-Linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to 1 Thessalonians* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 165; John Gillman, "Paul's *Ἐπίστροφος*: The Proclaimed and the Proclaimer (1 Thess 2,8)," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 68; Eduard Verhoef, *Tessalonicenzen. Een praktische bijbelverklaring* (Kampen: Kok, 1995), 28-30.

probably did not involve physical death and martyrdom¹³ but more likely entailed social harassment due to their refusal to participate in civic and cultic activities.¹⁴ Given the fact, then, that a number of the citizens of Thessalonica were harassing and persecuting members of the local church, it is not at all surprising that these attacks were also aimed at the church's leader, Paul, who was in the minds of some unbelievers in the city the source of the problem.

With respect to the second question, namely, the nature and content of the charges against which Paul is defending himself in 2:1-12, one must proceed carefully and avoid the dangers that often accompany a "mirror-reading" of the text, particularly the danger of over-interpreting the antithetical statements that occur in such a heavy concentration in this passage. That matter has been addressed in a number of studies that have established a set of criteria to ensure an appropriate use of mirror-reading.¹⁵ When these criteria are appropriately applied to 2:1-12 and especially to the first four antithetical statements in verses 1-7a, the evidence leads decisively to the same conclusion: Paul is defending himself against attacks on his integrity and the genuineness of his motives.¹⁶

Furthermore, there are enough additional clues from the rest of 1 Thessalonians, the other Pauline letters, and the account of Paul's visit to Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-10 to see how unbelievers in this city who were upset with this new movement founded by the apostle might "spin" certain facts in a way in which Paul's integrity would be challenged. The fact that Paul received financial help at least twice from the believers in Philippi during his original ministry in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16); the fact that, according to the account in Acts, Paul converted among others in Thessalonica "not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4) as well as Jason, who was wealthy enough to host the missionaries and also post bond for them (Acts 17:5-9); the fact that Paul abruptly left the Thessalonian church such that he is now "orphaned" from them (2:17) and

¹³So, e.g., Karl Donfried, "The Cults of Thessalonica," *NTS* 31 (1985): 347-52; also his "The Theology of 1 Thessalonians," in *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19-23; John S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul*, *JSNT* Sup 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 107-15; Juan Chapa, "Is First Thessalonians a Letter of Consolation?," *NTS* 40 (1994): 150-60, esp. 156.

¹⁴John Barclay, "Conflict in Thessalonica," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 514-15.

¹⁵See especially the seven criteria proposed by John Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73-93, esp. 84-85. For further comments about the appropriate use of mirror-reading, see Jerry L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 95-113; and Mosès Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 104-8.

¹⁶It is important in this discussion not to confuse the issue of apostolic *integrity* with that of apostolic *status*. The latter is a problem, for example, in Paul's letter to the Galatians where the opponents are inside the church and thus concerned with matters of authority and status. In the letter to the Thessalonians, however, where the opponents are outside of the church and thus understandably not concerned with such matters, their attack focuses instead on Paul's integrity.

has, prior to the sending of Timothy, not yet returned to Thessalonica nor even written to them (3:1-6)—all this information could quite easily be used by opponents of the Christian church in Thessalonica to question the integrity and motives of their founder.¹⁷ Especially in a culture where wandering teachers and sophists were widely known and criticized for their selfish motives,¹⁸ it is not difficult to see how those in Thessalonica who were opposed to the newly established group of Christians might accuse their founder of having less-than-honest intentions.

Although the Thessalonian believers have not bought into these charges, in the context of a young church separated from its leader and under heavy social pressure to resume their former pagan practices, Paul felt the need to answer these accusations in his defense of 2:1-12. The three metaphors of infants, nursing mother, and father, therefore, need to be understood in light of the apologetic function at work in this passage.

Paul as Infant (2:7b)

The most difficult thing about the first metaphor of infants that Paul employs in 2:7b may not be understanding its meaning and function but simply finding it in the text. Those who read the apostle's letter to the Thessalonians in English will search in vain to find the word *infants* anywhere in the verse of 2:7b. This is because virtually every English translation wrongly adopts the reading "gentle" (ἡπιολ) instead of the more strongly attested reading "infants" (νήπιολ).¹⁹ What's more, most of these translations fail to include even a footnote that alerts the reader to the existence of the alternate reading infants.²⁰

The textual debate of ἡπιολ versus νήπιολ, of course, is one of the better-known problems in textual studies. Time restraints do not allow me to examine this important textual issue in any detail. Nevertheless, please permit me the following brief observations.

¹⁷The fact that Paul refused to accept financial aid for his own ministry from certain churches (1 Thess. 2:9b; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 1 Cor. 9:12, 15, 18) and is at such pains to tell the Philippians that he does not "need" their financial assistance (Phil 4:10-20, esp. v. 17) presupposes the very real danger in Paul's mind that charges of greed and self-interest might be brought against him.

¹⁸Bruce Winter, "Entries and Ethics of the Orators and Paul (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12)," *TynBul* 44, no. 1 (1993): 55-74, esp. 60-64.

¹⁹So AV, RV, RSV, NRSV, NEB, NIV, NASB, NAB, NJB, REB, Phillips. The only exception apparently is the Contemporary English Version (American Bible Society, 1995), which reads: "We chose to be like children."

²⁰The textual problem here is further exacerbated by a punctuation error: modern versions (which adopt the reading "gentle") and even the standard Greek editions (which adopt the reading "infants") wrongly end the sentence too early after the phrase "apostles of Christ" in 2:7a and so begin a new clause already at 2:7b ("But we became"). See Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "'But We Became Infants Among You': The Case for NEIIIIOI in 1 Thess 2.7," *NTS* 46 (2000) 555-57.

First, the external evidence—the weight of the manuscripts themselves (i.e., their date, number, family text-type, and geographic location)—is decisively in favor of infants—a fact that even those opposed to this reading readily admit. This explains why the major Greek editions of the New Testament—the Nestle-Aland and the Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Society—have both adopted the reading infants.

Second, despite the various arguments based on the internal evidence that have been forwarded in support of the competing reading of gentle, none of them provides the needed justification for overriding the clear testimony of the external evidence.²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that a growing number of scholars have argued for the reading infants.²² This also accounts for the fact that the forthcoming revision of the NIV will adopt the reading *νήπιοι* and translate 2:7 as, “But we were like young children among you.”²³

Now that the word infants has been rightly placed into the text of 2:7b, let us look at the larger clause in which it occurs in order to see what function this metaphor has. The lengthy statement of 2:5-7b exhibits a greater degree of symmetry than is commonly recognized. This antithetical clause (not *x*, but *y*) consists of a lengthy negative half that contains three²⁴ denials (balancing somewhat the three denials in the preceding antithetical statement of 2:3-4), each of which is followed by a brief aside or parenthetical comment that in some sense repudiates the implied charge lying behind each denial and a positive half that contains a relatively brief affirmation:

οὔτε γάρ ποτε ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας ἐγενήθημεν,
καθὼς οἴδατε,
οὔτε ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας,
θεὸς μάρτυς,

²¹See Weima, “But We Became Infants Among You,” 547-64.

²²So Fika J. Janse van Rensburg, “An Argument for Reading *νήπιοι* in 1 Thessalonians 2:7,” *A South African Perspective on the New Testament: Essays by South African New Testament Scholars Presented to Bruce M. Metzger*, ed. J. H. Petzer and Patrick J. Hartin (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 252-59; Stephen Fowl, “A Metaphor in Distress: A Reading of ΝΕΠΙΟΙ in 1 Thessalonians 2.7,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 469-73; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Apostles as Babes and Nurses in 1 Thessalonians 2:7,” *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer*, ed. John T. Carroll, Charles H. Cosgrove, and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 193-207; Gordon D. Fee, “On Text and Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *SBL 1992 Seminar Papers*, ed. E. H. Lovering, *SBL Seminar Papers* 31 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 165-83; Timothy B. Sailors, “Wedding Textual and Rhetorical Criticism to Understand the Text of 1 Thessalonians 2.7,” *JSNT* 80 (2000): 85-102.

²³I thank Gordon Fee, who serves as a member of the Revision Committee for the NIV, for making me aware of this future change.

²⁴The fact that the negative conjunction οὔτε occurs five times in 2:5-7b might lead to the conclusion that there are five denials in this antithetical statement. The final three of these five negatives, however, all deal with the one denial of Paul in 2:6 that he did not seek honor from people. Thus, it is preferable to speak of three denials and to view the fourth and fifth negatives as clarifying the third denial: “nor were we seeking glory from people, *neither* from you *nor* from others.”

⁶οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν, οὔτε ἀφ' ὑμῶν οὔτε ἄλλων,
^{7a}δυναίμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι,
^{7b}ἀλλὰ ἐγενήθημεν νήπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν.

⁵For we never came with a word of flattery,

—as you know—

nor with a motive of greed,

—God is our witness!—

⁶nor were we demanding honor from people, neither from you nor from others,

^{7a}—even though we could have insisted on our importance as apostles of Christ—

^{7b}but we became infants among you.

In the first denial of verse 5a, Paul claims that “we never came with a word of flattery” (ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας). Although the term κολακεία occurs only here in the New Testament, the meaning of this noun can be easily discerned from its use in the ancient world. Theophrastus, after defining flattery as “a shameful business, but profitable for the flatterer” (*Characters*, 2.1), concludes his discussion by stating that “you will see the flatterer say and do all the things that he hopes will ingratiate him” (*Characters*, 2.13). Aristotle claims that the person “whose goal is to make people happy in order to profit in money or in goods which can be bought with money is the flatterer” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.6.9). The term κολακεία frequently appears in catalogs of vices, such as in Philo who lists “flattery” alongside of “trickery,” “deceitfulness,” and “false speaking” (*On the Sacrifice of Abel and Cain*, 22). Plutarch condemns the use of flattery and contrasts it with παρρησία, “boldness of speech” (*Moralia*, 48e-74e). Dio Chrysostom describes certain Cynics who deceive others through flattery rather than speaking with the boldness and frankness of the true philosopher (*Oration*, 32).

These uses of κολακεία help determine in what sense Paul did not come to the Thessalonian Christians “with a word of flattery.” The apostle denies that his original preaching²⁵ to them did not involve deceptive language, empty praise, or false promises to trick the hearers into accepting the gospel. The context of this first denial, where Paul has just claimed that he speaks “not as one who pleases people” (2:4) and where he will soon assert that he is “not demanding honor from people” (2:6), suggests that the apostle wants to distance himself from street-corner philosophers and wandering rhetoricians who typically used flattering speech to ingratiate themselves to the crowds.

Because the first denial deals with outward behavior, Paul can appeal in the first brief aside yet again (see 2:1, 2) to the personal knowledge that the readers have: “as you know.” In other words, the Thessalonian Christians have first-

²⁵The noun λόγος in the phrase ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας has in view Paul’s mission-founding preaching (see 1:5).

hand knowledge of how the apostle was different from other traveling speakers of his day who employed flattery to win followers and financial profits.

In the second denial of verse 5b, Paul claims that he and his co-workers did not come “with a motive of greed” (ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας). It is hardly surprising that Paul mentions greed here, because the motive of avarice was frequently connected with flattery (see the ancient sources cited above). Although the noun πλεονεξία need not be limited to the desire for money,²⁶ the context of this verse makes it almost certain that Paul is thinking specifically of financial greed, given the fact that wandering teachers of that day were typically accused of being interested solely in monetary gain. The very real possibility that such a charge is being brought against Paul is evident from the fact that later in his life he refutes the charge of πλεονεξία against himself in connection with the relief offering he was collecting for the needy Christians in Judea (2 Cor. 9:5; 12:17-18).

Because the second denial deals with an inward motive that is impossible for the Thessalonian Christians to discern, Paul appeals in the second brief aside to the only one who can know and judge the integrity of his motive: “God is a witness!” The practice of appealing to God as a witness can be found in the Old Testament (Job 16:19; Ps. 89:37; Wis. 1:6), although it is a common enough occurrence in Hellenistic writings as well. Paul, however, rarely invokes God as a witness in his letters, doing so elsewhere only three times (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8).²⁷ The fact that he makes an unparalleled second appeal to God as a witness a few verses later (2:10), along with the preceding double claim in 2:4 that God has “examined” him, is striking and supports the claim the Paul is, in fact, defending himself in this passage.²⁸

In the third denial of verse 6, Paul repudiates any notion that his past ministry in Thessalonica was motivated by the selfish desire to gain human praise: “nor were we demanding honor from people, neither from you nor from others (οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν, οὔτε ἀφ’ ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ’ ἄλλων). The word δόξα does not have here its usual New Testament meaning of “glory” in a religious sense (see, e.g., 2:12) but the common secular meaning of “fame, recognition, renown, honor, or prestige” (*BDAG*, 257; see, e.g., 2:20). The denial of demanding honor follows naturally after the denial of acting out of

²⁶The noun is derived from the comparative “more” (πλέον) and the verb “to have” (ἔχω), and so can refer more broadly to the selfish desire to obtain anything that one does not already have. Thus, for example, πλεονεξία can be associated with sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:6; Eph. 4:19; 5:3; see also Rom. 1:29).

²⁷Note also two occurrences where Paul, without using the term μάρτυς, claims in the presence of God that he is not lying: Gal. 1:20; 2 Cor. 11:31.

²⁸Morris, *Thessalonians*, 65, notes: “There can be no mistaking the intense seriousness with which he writes, nor the depth of his conviction that the methods and motives of the preachers would bear the closest scrutiny.”

greed, because a demand for honor was another insincere motive commonly ascribed to traveling speakers. In fact, the link between financial gain and human praise can be seen in Dio Chrysostom, who identifies false philosophers as those who deliver orations for “their own profit and honor (δόξα)” (*Oration*, 32:10-11). The thought of the third denial, therefore, is that Paul and his fellow missionaries did not demand²⁹ honor from either the Thessalonian Christians (“neither from you”) or other believers (“nor from others”).

For yet a third time, Paul follows his denial with an aside or parenthetical comment that functions to repudiate the implied charge lying behind the denial: “even though we could have insisted on our importance as apostles of Christ.” The key word in this phrase is the noun βάρος, which literally means “weight, burden.” Here, however, the noun has an obviously figurative sense, and this has resulted in two possible meanings: (1) “financial burden,” namely, the responsibility that the church has to support financially the apostles in their work; or (2) “weight of authority or dignity,” namely, the responsibility that the church has to respect and honor the apostles in their work. Although evidence supporting the first meaning of financial support can be cited,³⁰ the literary pattern of a denial followed by an aside requires the second meaning of weight of authority or dignity.³¹ In colloquial language, Paul says: “As a ‘heavy hitter’ in the church, I could have pulled rank on you and demanded that you give me honor.”³²

After the lengthy negative half of the antithetical statement with its three denials and three accompanying asides (2:5-7a), Paul finally completes his thought with the corresponding positive half that, though brief, is remarkable for the metaphor it contains: “but we became infants among you” (2:7b). It is

²⁹The participle ζητοῦντες normally conveys the sense of “seeking” or “desiring,” but sometimes has the stronger connotation of “demanding” or “requiring” something (*BDAG*, 428), and such a rendering provides a better contrast with the third aside that immediately follows in 2:7a (so Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 98; see also Frame, *Thessalonians*, 98-99).

³⁰The fact that βάρος and its cognates occur frequently in the Greek papyri with respect to financial charges (J. G. Strelan, “Burden-Bearing and the Law of Christ: A Re-examination of Galatians 6.2,” *JBL* 94 [1975]: 266-76), as well as Paul’s use of the cognate verb in 2:9 to refer to monetary support and his denial in 2:5 that he came “with a motive of greed,” have led a few scholars to adopt this first interpretation (e.g., Chrysostom; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* [Waco, Tex: Word, 1982]: 30-31); Morris, *Thessalonians*, 66-67).

³¹The proper ground of this denial is not that Paul did not demand financial support but that he did not selfishly insist that honor (δόξα) be given to him by the congregation. The fact that δόξα in the Septuagint translates the Hebrew root *kbd*, meaning “be weighty,” strengthens the link between the denial that Paul sought “honor” (δόξα) from people and the parenthetical comment that he could have made use of his position of “weight” (βάρος), and so further supports the claim that βάρος here refers to the weight of authority or influence. Although Paul does bring up the issue of finances in 2:9, he seemingly presents this matter as a new subject rather than as a continuation of an earlier statement (Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 99).

³² See Gaventa, *Thessalonians*, 26.

now clear that this metaphor of infants serves to contrast (note again the strong adversative “but” [see also 2:2 and 2:4]) not the immediately preceding phrase in verse 7a but the whole clause of verses 5–7a, particularly the three denials that Paul “came with a word of flattery,” “with a motive of greed,” and “demanding honor.” In contrast to these impure motives—motives typically associated with the wandering teachers of that day—Paul asserts that he and his fellow missionaries during their past ministry in Thessalonica “became infants among you.”

In this specific historical context where Paul’s apologetic concern is so prominent, the function of the infant metaphor becomes clear: It serves to highlight the innocence of the apostle and his co-workers. Little babies are not capable of using deceptive speech, having ulterior motives, and being concerned with receiving honor; in all these things they are innocent. Philo similarly speaks about the innocence of infants, claiming, “it is impossible for the greatest liar to invent a charge against them, as they are wholly innocent” (*Special Laws*, 3.119.4).

Some have questioned the appropriateness of this infant metaphor, claiming that Paul’s use of *νήπιος* elsewhere is “almost always pejorative” and using this assertion as further support for the alternate reading of gentle.³³ However, while the word *νήπιος* is used to describe the immaturity of new believers (1 Cor. 3:1), a survey of Paul’s other uses of this term (Rom. 2:20; 1 Cor. 13:11 [5x]; Gal. 4:1,3; Eph. 4:14) reveals that it does not always have a negative connotation. In fact, Paul does use the cognate verb in a positive manner in 1 Cor. 14:20 (“be infants with respect to evil”). Thus, Paul appears to use the infant metaphor in a somewhat “fluid” fashion³⁴ such that even within the same letter it can have a pejorative sense (1 Cor. 3:1), a neutral sense (1 Cor. 13:11 [5x]), and a positive sense (1 Cor. 14:20). Elsewhere in the Scriptures—both in the Septuagint (e.g., Pss. 18[19]: 7; 118[119]: 130; Wis. 10:21) and in the Gospels (Matt. 11:25; 21:16; Luke 10:21)—*νήπιος* refers to those whose motives are pure and without guile.³⁵ An examination of the term outside of the Scriptures in the literature from the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. similarly reveals how infant was used in a positive sense.³⁶

Paul’s affirmative use of the infant metaphor, therefore, should in no way be viewed as problematic for a writer of that day. Quite the contrary, this bold

³³So Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 100; J. Delobel, “One Letter Too Many in Paul’s First Letter? A Study of (*ν*)*νηπιος* in 1 Thessalonians 2.7,” *Lowain Studies* 20 (1995): 128-29.

³⁴Fee, “On Text and Commentary,” 177.

³⁵Gaventa, “Apostles as Babes and Nurses,” 196.

³⁶The statistical analysis by Sailors (“Wedding Textual and Rhetorical Criticism,” 95-6) reveals the following results. The term is used the vast majority of time (75 percent) as a neutral, purely descriptive term meaning “infant.” The negative sense of “childish” or “foolish” occurs 18.68 percent of the time, whereas the positive sense occurs 6.23 percent of the time. Interestingly, Sailor notes that the percentage of positive uses of *νήπιος* is dramatically higher among Christian authors.

image of becoming infants serves as a fitting contrast to the impure motives of coming “with a word of flattery,” “a motive of greed,” and “demanding honor.” In this way, the metaphor provides a powerful defense for the integrity of Paul and his fellow missionaries during their past visit to Thessalonica.

The notion of innocence evoked by the first metaphor of infants also presents a powerful challenge for pastors today in terms of their motives in ministry. It raises such self-reflective questions as: Do I serve only to have my Lord one day say: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” or to have my parishioners regularly tell me: “What a great minister you are!” When I lead worship services, do I pray that people will leave church saying: “What a Savior!” or do I also hope to hear: “What a preacher!” Do I seek to be faithful in all aspects of ministry, or do I concentrate my time and energy on those parts that bring me public recognition and prestige? Do I visit lower and middle-income members of my congregation with the same eagerness and frequency as those who are clearly well to do? Am I content serving in my modest church, or am I preoccupied with winning a call from a larger and more prestigious congregation? Do I expect members of my church and community to cut me a special deal on goods or services just because of my status as a pastor?

Non-Christians often dismiss the challenge of the gospel by pointing to the lack of integrity that many ministers have, not only those TV evangelists whose disgraced conduct is public fodder for the late-night comedians but also local pastors whose concern for their ego, salary, or both are sadly too well known. Even Christians are becoming increasingly cynical about the reasons why their pastor has gone into the ministry. Today’s minister, therefore, must speak and act in ways that put his or her motives beyond reproach. In short, pastors ought to be as innocent as infants.

Paul as Nursing Mother (2:7c)

A second remarkable family metaphor occurs in the immediately following sentence as Paul in 2:7c likens himself to a nursing mother. This clause takes the form of a correlative clause (as *x*, so *y*), whose second member consists of an assertion that is bracketed by two causal clauses and that also contains an antithetical statement:

⁷ὥς ἔαν τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα,
 ⁸οὕτως
 ὁμειρόμενοι ὑμῶν
 εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν
 οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ
 ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς,
 διότι ἀγαπητοὶ ἡμῖν ἐγενήθητε.

^{7c}As a nursing mother cherishes her own children,
⁸so we,
 because we cared so much for you,
 were pleased to share with you
 not only the gospel of God
 but also our own selves,
 because you became beloved to us.

The word used for “mother” is not the common word *μήτηρ* but *τροφός*, which properly refers to a “nurse,” someone hired to care for children. Because this noun derives from the verb *τρέφω* meaning “to feed, nourish, provide with food,” it often has the more specified meaning of “wet nurse,” someone who suckles children. The use of such wet nurses or lactating nurses was widespread in the Greco-Roman world among both the higher and the lower classes.³⁷ Writers of that day typically portrayed the wet nurse as an important and beloved figure, and there are a number of ancient inscriptions in which adults honor those who nursed them.³⁸

While Paul’s analogy to a *τροφός* may be restricted to that of a wet nurse, there are at least three reasons to extend the metaphor to that of a mother or, better yet, nursing mother. First and foremost, the reflexive pronoun in the phrase “her *own* children” (*τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα*) indicates that the woman in the metaphor is the natural mother of the children.³⁹ Second, the use of *τροφός* to refer to a mother has classical justification.⁴⁰ Third, the surrounding family metaphors of infants (2:7b) and father (2:11) suggest that Paul has in view here another member of the family, the mother, rather than the hired wet nurse.

Why, then, did the apostle use *τροφός* instead of the more common word for mother, *μήτηρ*? Although different answers have been proposed,⁴¹ the simplest and most likely reason is that this metaphor underscores the apostle’s love for his readers. A nurse competently cares for the children in her charge, but she

³⁷Keith R. Bradley, “Wet-Nursing at Rome: A Study in Social Relations,” in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 201-29.

³⁸Gaventa, “Apostles as Babes and Nurses,” 201; Gaventa, *Thessalonians*, 27.

³⁹Although the reflexive pronoun in late Greek was losing its emphatic force such that *ἑαυτῆς* (“her own”) sometimes was equivalent to *αὐτῆς* (“her” [see BDF §283]), there is little justification for translating the phrase *τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα* as “the children entrusted to her personal care” rather than “her own children.”

⁴⁰BDAG 1017. See also the sources listed in Lightfoot, *Notes*, 25.

⁴¹Malherbe (“Gentle as a Nurse,” 211-214; *Thessalonians*, 146, 160) suggests that Paul is influenced by the philosophers of his day who commonly used the metaphor of a nurse to depict the way that such teachers should gently care for those whom they taught and nourished in the truth. Donfried (“Cults of Thessalonica,” 338, 340) suggests that the metaphor of a nurse may stem from various figures connected with the mystery religions practiced at Thessalonica (e.g., the divine women who play a central role in the Dionysiac mysteries are referred to as “nurses”; Tethys, wife of the river god, Okeanos, is described as the “kindly nurse and provider of all things”).

“cherishes” (the rare verb *θάλπω*, literally means “keep warm,” but figuratively has the sense of “cherish, comfort”: see also Eph. 5:29) her own children even more.⁴² Thus, whereas the first metaphor of infants highlights the innocence of Paul’s conduct and motives during his past visit to Thessalonica, the second metaphor of a nursing mother focuses on the love that Paul had for Thessalonian believers during his past visit. As the commentator James Everett Frame put it almost a century ago: “The point of the new metaphor is love, the love of a mother-nurse for her own children.”⁴³

That love is indeed the key aspect emphasized in the metaphor of a nursing mother can be clearly seen in three aspects found in the second half of the correlative clause. First, there is the emotional warmth expressed in the rare participial clause: “because we cared so much for you” (*ὀμειρόμενοι ὑμῶν*). The meaning of the participle *ὀμειρόμενοι* is somewhat uncertain,⁴⁴ because this word is attested only four times in all Greek literature. The three remaining occurrences in Job 3:21 (LXX), Symmachus’ translation of Ps. 62:2, and a fourth-century C.E. tombstone inscription (*CIG*, 3.4000.7) describing a couple’s sad yearning for their deceased child suggest that the term means “long for someone” (BDAG 705), “have affection for someone” (*LSJ*, 1221), “a warm inward attachment.”⁴⁵ This sense is supported by early interpreters such as Hesychius of Alexandria (5th century A.D.) who equates the term with *ἐπιθυμέω* and the Vulgate with *desidero*. It receives additional support from the tendency of some later copyists to replace this enigmatic verb with the more common *ἰμείρομαι*, meaning “long for,” both here in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 and in Job 3:21 (LXX). The participle *ὀμειρόμενοι*, therefore, reinforces the meaning of the nursing-mother metaphor as it expresses in a powerful way the deep and continuing (note the present tense) love that Paul has for his readers.

The emotion of love conveyed in the nursing-mother metaphor is supported secondly by Paul’s assertion that “we were pleased⁴⁶ to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves” (*εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς*). In this

⁴² So, e.g., Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 71; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 101; Holmes, *Thessalonians*, 64.

⁴³ Frame, *Thessalonians*, 100-1.

⁴⁴ Two suggestions have been forwarded concerning the derivation of *ὀμειρόμαι*. The first claims that the form comes from *ὄμοῦ* and *εἶρειν* and thus means “to be attached to.” The second argues that the form derives from the verb *μείρεσθαι* (“to divide, separate”) with a prothetic omicron and should be taken here in the passive sense “having been separated” (Norbert Baumert, “*ὀμειρόμενοι* in 1 Thess 2,8,” *Biblica* 68 [1987]: 552-63). For objections to each of these two possibilities, see Lightfoot, *Notes*, 25-26.

⁴⁵ H. W. Heidland, “*ὀμειρόμαι*,” *TDNT* 5:176.

⁴⁶ Although it is difficult to determine whether the verb *εὐδοκοῦμεν* (see also 3:1) expresses the notion of either resolve (NRSV: “we are determined”) or joy (NIV: “we were delighted”), the strong, affectionate tone of the passage supports the latter option.

context, the word ψυχῆ does not refer to physical life, as if Paul were speaking of his willingness to lay down his life for the Thessalonian believers as proof of his love for them.⁴⁷ The term rather describes the inner, emotional life of Paul, his “very self.” The apostle, therefore, did not preach “the gospel of God” (see 2:2, 4) during his mission-founding visit in a cold and aloof manner but instead involved himself in a very personal and self-denying way in the lives of the Thessalonians. As Howard Marshall puts it: “The language is that of love in which a lover wants to share his life with the beloved in an act of self-giving and union.”⁴⁸

That the metaphor of nursing mother serves to highlight Paul’s love for the Thessalonian Christians is made clear thirdly in the concluding, causal clause: “because you became beloved to us” (διότι ἀγαπητοὶ ἡμῖν ἐγενήθητε). The readers are thus beloved not only to God (1:4) but also to Paul and his fellow missionaries. Although this closing clause presents no new claims or ideas but repeats the message expressed in the rest of 2:7c-8, it has the rhetorical effect of further emphasizing the love that Paul has for his converts in Thessalonica.

The cumulative effect of having the nursing-mother metaphor followed by these three expressions of love is a powerful expression of Paul’s sincere feelings for his Thessalonian readers. As Charles Wanamaker justly observes: “Certainly no other passage in the whole of the Pauline corpus employs such deeply affective language in describing Paul’s relation with his converts.”⁴⁹

This second metaphor of a nursing mother with its powerful portrayal of Paul’s love for the Thessalonian Christians also serves as an important example for the kind of love that all ministers ought to have for the members in their church. Love for other people is an indispensable requirement for ministry. A pastor may preach in the tongues of men and angels, but if he does not genuinely love his parishioners, he is only a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. A pastor may have graduated from seminary at the top of her class and may understand all mysteries and knowledge, but if she does not have love, she is nothing. Although effective ministry demands that pastors act in professional ways, the ministry must never become a profession in which one does only those things that are part of the job description and no more. The ministry must always be a divine calling—a calling from God for pastors to love the people that he has placed under their spiritual leadership.

What does such loving conduct look like in a pastor’s life? Love shows itself in the pastor’s ability to remember the names of other people and facts about their lives. Love shows itself in the respectful way that the pastor treats the church secretary, custodian, or organist. Love shows itself in the pastor who is more interested in listening to others talk about their lives than in telling them

⁴⁷So Lightfoot, *Notes*, 26.

⁴⁸Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 71.

⁴⁹Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 102.

about his. Love shows itself in the pastor's willingness to be involved in the lives of her parishioners so that she can "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). In short, pastors ought to deal with their parishioners with the same kind of passionate selfless love that a nursing mother has for her own children.

Paul as Father (2:11)

The third striking family metaphor that Paul employs is found in 2:11 where the apostle likens himself to a father. This metaphor occurs as part of the larger main clause in 2:10-12 that, though long and missing at one point a required verb, has a structure that is relatively clear. The first part of the clause (vv. 10-12a) consists of two more appeals to the first-hand knowledge of the Thessalonians ("you are witnesses, and God also"; "just as you know"), each of which is followed in parallel fashion by the relative adverb "how" (ὡς) that introduces an indirect statement giving the content of that knowledge.⁵⁰ The second part of the clause (vv. 12b) consists of a purpose statement ("in order that") which marks a major transition away from the focus on Paul and his integrity during his mission-founding visit (2:1-12) to the Thessalonians and their response to Paul's past visit (2:13-16). Thus, the text can be outlined as follows:

- ¹⁰ὤμεις μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός,
ὡς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν,
¹¹καθάπερ οἶδατε
ὡς [...] ἕνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν ὡς πατὴρ τέκνα ἑαυτοῦ
¹²παρακαλοῦντες ὑμᾶς καὶ παραμυθούμενοι καὶ μαρτυρόμενοι
εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ
τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν.
- ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also,
how holy and righteous and blameless we were to you believers,
¹¹just as you know
how we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children,
¹²appealing and encouraging and imploring you
in order that you may lead a life worthy of God,
the one who is calling you into his own kingdom and glory.

The image of a father in the patriarchal society of the ancient world was of one who possessed ultimate authority over all members of the household, including, of course, the children.⁵¹ In fact, both Greco-Roman and Jewish

⁵⁰BDAG list the use of ὡς in 1 Thess. 2:10 and 2:11 as "after verbs of knowing, saying (even introducing direct discourse), hearing, and so forth = ὅτι *that*" (p. 1105:5; see also BDF §396).

⁵¹In the following discussion, I am indebted to the recent study of Trevor J. Burke, "Family Matters: An Exegetical and Socio-Historical Analysis of Familial Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000).

sources emphasize the hierarchical relationship of father to their children, often with language that jars the egalitarian spirit of our modern age. Aristotle states: “The father is a kind of god to his children, a full head and shoulders above them, and rightly so, for the father is a king” (*Pol.*, 1.12.3; see also *Nichomachean Ethics*, 8.11.2). Aristotle not only views children as subordinate to their parents but as a possession owned by them: “Children are a good possessed by both parents in common, and common property holds people together” (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 8.12.7). Plutarch similarly locates parents on a hierarchical scale in which they are second in rank only to the gods: “Both Nature and the Law, which uphold Nature, have assigned to parents, after the gods, first and greatest honor” (*Frat. Amor.*, 7/479F). Artimedorus, the Greek philosopher, locates parents in the fourth position of his hierarchical schema after the gods, priests, and kings: “Then parents . . . for they are also like gods; parents because they bring us into life” (*Book*, 2.69). Hierocles, like Aristotle, views parents as not only having authority over their offspring, but also having ownership of them: “For whose possession should we be than those through whom we exist?” (4.25.53).

Jewish writers were influenced by the fifth commandment to honor one’s parents—a commandment that establishes the authority of the parents and especially that of the “father [who is] the head of the house” (Philo *Mut. Nom.*, 217). After examining the parent-child relationship in the writings of Philo, Josephus, and Pseudo-Phocylides, Trevor Burke concludes:

All three authors emphasize that this relationship is essentially an hierarchical one. Whilst Pseudo-Phocylides deems parents worthy of respect because they stand next in line to that of God, both Philo and Josephus used the Torah to justify the view that a hierarchical framework is not only God’s arrangement for society as a whole, but for the family as well. As such, children belong to the inferior class, whilst fathers are superior and better suited to rule.⁵²

In light of the overwhelming testimony of the Greco-Roman and Jewish sources that depict the father as an authoritative figure, it might be easy to create a stereotyped image of the father as a cold, omnipotent ruler of his household. This image, however, must be balanced by the many texts that clearly reveal the great affection that fathers had for their children.⁵³ A father may have been a powerful figure in the ancient world but the term *father* also served to evoke the emotion of love.

The notion of authority associated with the father figure also appears in Paul’s letters. In 1 Corinthians, for example, the apostle is increasingly frustrated over the church’s infatuation with leaders (especially Apollos) other

⁵²Burke, “Family Matters,” 70.

⁵³Burke, “Family Matters,” 56-9, 80, 83-4, 88-92, 106-9.

than himself. In this context, Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that “though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). In other words, though the church may have had many other itinerant preachers or leaders, these are only mere “nannies” (παιδαγωγοί) in contrast to Paul who had given birth to them through the preaching of the gospel and thus was their one and only spiritual father. The concept of authority connected to the father figure is also found in Paul’s commendation of Timothy to the Philippians: “But you know his [Timothy’s] worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (Phil. 2:22).

What then about the metaphor of father in 1 Thessalonians 2:11? Paul’s role as a father here is spelled out in three participles that modify the omitted main verb:⁵⁴ “appealing and encouraging and imploring you” (παρακαλοῦντες ὑμᾶς καὶ παραμυθούμενοι καὶ μαρτυρόμενοι). The first verb, παρακαλέω, is, by far, the most common of the three forms, occurring some fifty-four times in Paul’s letters as a whole and eight times in this letter (2:12; 3:2, 7; 4:1, 10, 18; 5:11, 14). Although the verb possesses a wide range of meanings,⁵⁵ these possibilities can be grouped into two primary nuances: either command (“appeal, exhort, request, implore”) or comfort (“encourage, comfort, cheer up, console”). The second verb, παραμυθέομαι, is much less frequent in Paul, appearing only here and later in the letter in 5:14 (see also John 11:19, 31). This term outside of Scripture “almost always has affective connotations, with the highly nuanced meanings of ‘advise, encourage, console, comfort, speak calming words to, appease, soothe.’”⁵⁶ The third verb, μαρτύρομαι, is also infrequent in Paul, occurring elsewhere only in Galatians 5:3 and Ephesians 4:17 (although the closely related form διαμαρτύρομαι is used in 1 Thess. 4:6; 1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:14; 4:1). Although no longer possessing its original sense of invoking witnesses (“testify, bear witness”), this verb still has a more authoritative nuance than the two preceding verbs: “insist, implore” (BDAG 619).

It is difficult to determine the specific nuance Paul intends in these three participles, particularly the first two. The notion of comfort would fit the church’s problem of suffering ridicule and ostracism for their newfound faith. The notion of command, however, agrees better with the metaphor of a father and his expected role as the authoritative figure in the household who appeals, encourages, and even implores his children to pursue proper learning and conduct.

⁵⁴All three participles function circumstantially to give the manner in which Paul “dealt with each one of you as a father with his children.”

⁵⁵BDAG, 764-5 list five different senses.

⁵⁶Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. James D. Ernest (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 3.30-35; see also G. Stählin, “παραμυθέομαι,” *TDNT*, 5:816-23.

This authoritative, fatherly role that Paul played during his original visit to Thessalonica had a very specific purpose⁵⁷: “in order that you may lead a life worthy of God” (εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ). The verb περιπατέω literally means, “to walk,” but it has the metaphorical sense of “living one’s life.”⁵⁸ It is not only one of Paul’s favorite words to describe the Christian life (it occurs some thirty-two times in his letters), it is also one of his more strategic terms as it is used to introduce themes that the apostle considered to be fundamental.⁵⁹ Because walking is a neutral concept that can denote either positive or negative conduct (for the latter, see 2 Cor. 4:2 and 10:2), more precision is almost always given to the term by the addition of a prepositional phrase, a dative of the attendant circumstance, or, as here, an adverb: “to walk *worthily*” (see also Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10). The use of *worthily* (ἀξίως) as a qualifier suggests a life that is equivalent to or in agreement to some standard.⁶⁰ This standard is itself further explained as “of God” (τοῦ θεοῦ). The resultant phrase, “worthily of God” is one that occurs in Hellenistic religion to describe the conduct of priests and other followers who were required to live in a way that corresponded to the character and demands of the particular god that they worshipped.⁶¹ By analogy, therefore, the Christians in Thessalonica must conduct themselves in a manner that corresponds to the character and demands of their God.

What, then, is this character of God to which the conduct of the Thessalonian Christians must correspond? It is God’s work of election: “the one who is calling you into his own kingdom and glory” (τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν). This phrase makes it clear that, though the Thessalonian Christians must live in a way that is worthy of God, such conduct in no way earns their salvation but rather is a response to the free and unmer-

⁵⁷The use of an articular infinitive with the preposition εἰς is an almost exclusively Pauline construction in the NT that normally expresses purpose or result (BDF §402.2). A few have questioned whether this function of the articular infinitive is present here in 2:12 (Moulton, *Grammar*, 1.219: “Purpose is so remote here as to be practically evanescent”) and argued that this construction instead gives the content of the preceding three participles (so Milligan, *Thessalonians*, 26). It seems best, however, to view this construction as having its normal meaning of purpose or result (so the majority of commentators; note the mediating position of Marshall, *Thessalonians*, 74 who states: “Now comes the purpose of the ethical appeal, which is at the same time a statement of its content”).

⁵⁸This metaphorical use of *walking* to describe moral conduct and an ethical way of life has its roots in Paul’s Jewish background (approximately two hundred of the 1547 occurrences of ἔλεω are metaphorical or figurative). The metaphor also occurs in nonbiblical Greek (but with much less frequency and normally with the verb πορεύομαι) and thus would have been readily understood by his readers (H. Seesemann, “πατέω,” *TDNT* 5.940-45; Joseph O. Holloway, *Peripateō as a Thematic Marker for Pauline Ethics* [San Francisco: Mellen, 1992], 1-27).

⁵⁹Holloway, *Peripateō as a Thematic Marker*.

⁶⁰W. Foerster, “ἄξιως,” *TDNT*, 1.379-80.

⁶¹See the inscriptions from Pergamon and Magnesia cited by Milligan, *Thessalonians*, 26 and Frame, *Thessalonians*, 105.

ited “call” of God. Paul has raised the theme of the Thessalonians’ election already at the very beginning of the letter (1:4) and will do so three more times later in the correspondence (4:7; 5:7; 5:24). Elsewhere, the apostle typically uses the aorist tense to refer to God’s initial call at the time of conversion (4:7; 2 Thess. 2:14; Gal. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:9). The use of the present tense here in 2:12 (see also 5:24; Gal. 5:8) by contrast highlights the ongoing and effective (for the apostle God’s call is always effective [1 Thess. 5:23-24; Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9]) nature of the call. To a church experiencing opposition because of their new-found faith, it is especially encouraging to know that God has not called them once in the past and subsequently abandoned them to their own resources but rather continues to call them and so will ensure that they “be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). It is also, however, challenging to know that this ongoing call of God must be responded to with the ongoing need “to lead a life worthy of God.”

Paul’s role as a father to the Thessalonian church has some important implications for ministers today. In our current egalitarian age, many want to downplay the authoritative role that pastors have. Church bulletin covers frequently list under the heading “Minister” not just the individual name of the pastor but the phrase, “All congregational members.” The concept of servant-leadership has become the new paradigm for pastors to adopt—a paradigm that emphasizes the notion of servanthood and by default downplays the idea of authority. How does all this relate to authoritative, fatherly role that Paul played as pastor to the Thessalonian church?

On the one hand, the metaphor of father suggests that pastors do, in fact, have an authoritative role within the family of God. Ministers need to recognize that they are in some important sense different from the other members of their church. In their ordination to the ministry, the church recognizes that God has called pastors to the special role—the authoritative, fatherly role—of being a leader in the church. This means that pastors do not wait to discover how church members feel about an issue before venturing an opinion but dare to move ahead of the congregation in articulating a vision for the future. This means that pastors do not quickly retract statements or change their opinion at the first sign of disapproval but offer suggestions that run the risk of being unpopular. This means that pastors do not squelch expressions of group conflict as quickly as possible but boldly lead a congregation with wise and biblical counsel.

On the other hand, the metaphor of father does not justify a pastor’s abusive use of authority. There is no support in the father metaphor for a domineering dominee who coerces or manipulates a congregation into submitting to his will or agenda. Instead, the purpose of a pastor’s authority must always be—following the example of Paul—to get parishioners “to lead a life worthy of God.” The authority that a minister has must be exercised in the activities of “appealing, encouraging, and imploring” believers to respond faithfully to the God “who is calling them into his own kingdom and glory.” That is the authoritative, fatherly role that pastors have been divinely called to have within the family of God.

Conclusion

It is striking that Paul, a single man who elsewhere argues in favor of celibacy, chooses to portray his pastoral labors among the Thessalonian Christians with the family metaphors of an infant, a nursing mother, and a father. The apostle effectively defends the integrity of his mission-founding work by asserting that he acted in a way that was as innocent as an infant, as loving as a nursing-mother, and as authoritative as a father. These three family metaphors provide not only pastors but also teachers of pastors with powerful pictures of how they ought to conduct themselves in their divine calling. Today we give thanks to God for our New Testament emeriti: three men who have faithfully fulfilled this calling throughout their many years of service at Calvin Theological Seminary. Today we give thanks to God for Andrew Bandstra, David Holwerda, and Bastiaan VanElderen: three infants whose integrity could never be challenged; three nursing mothers whose love for students was evident in so many ways; three fathers whose authority was always exercised in faithful and Christ-like ways.