

I Thess. 2:1-8

2 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

From the Orthodox Study Bible: St. Paul defends his apostolic work claiming he has served with courage, humility and love. Christians are repeatedly challenged in the New Testament to be bold in confessing Christ before others. Paul has been accused of seeking his own glory, but he knows God does not share His glory with any other. As his servants, we must step outside the circle of world-pleasers and into the arena of pleasing God, whatever the cost. Spreading the Gospel means putting our lives on the line for those we seek to reach, as a mother sacrifices herself for her children. Thus, the holy martyrs gave their lives with great joy for Christ and His Church.

Luke 9:44-50

44 Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.

45 But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.

46 Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.

47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him,

48 And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

49 And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.

50 And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

From the Orthodox Study Bible: Christ's repeated prediction of His Passion was meant to encourage and strengthen His disciples for the terrifying events they would face, and to assure them that Christ was not powerless but went to the Cross willingly. St. Theophylact sees John's comment [vs. 49] as a regret, his conscience having been pricked by what Christ said about the least and the great. St. Ambrose, on the other hand, sees John as expecting full obedience to accompany such blessings. In either interpretation, Christ's response shows those acting in good faith are not excluded, even if they are not currently numbered among the disciples. "See how divine grace is at work even in those who are not His disciples" (St. Theophylact).

Three issues: one is to avoid the passion of vainglory (as seen w/disciples vying with each other as to who was the greatest); two is to have the virtue of childlike simplicity and innocence, knowing nothing of evil; three is the question of Divine Grace working in those who are not "official" disciples—from Orthodox point of view: the heterodox.

Passion of Vainglory: St. Theophylact says that this passion arose among them because they had been unable to heal the demon-possessed child. It is likely that they were quarreling over this failure, each one saying “it was not because of MY weakness, but because of YOURS or someone else’s weakness that the child was not healed.” And this kindled an argument between them as to who was the greatest...the Lord in placing a child before them shows that because young children have no knowledge or experience of evil, and being simple and uncomplicated; they are not troubled by thoughts of vainglory and rank. As if He said “You think that if you appear to be haughty and important you will make a pleasing impression on the crowd, and greater numbers will welcome you.

Virtue of Simplicity of Heart: According to the witness of Nikephoros Xanthopoulos (14th c.) the child that the Lord placed before the disciples was the future Hieromartyr Ignatius the Godbearer, Bishop of Antioch. Archbishop Averky says that ‘whoever humbles himself, acknowledges himself to be unworthy of the kingdom of heaven; whoever will consider himself to be worse than others, only he will end up the greater. Thus, whoever rejects his own imagined greatness, whoever turns from ambition and pride to humility and meekness, whoever becomes as apparently insignificant as this little child, he will have the greater importance in the kingdom of heaven.

Concerning those who performed miracles in Christ’s Name but did not follow Him: Archbishop Averky says that since the Twelve Apostles were chosen by Christ and even given the Grace of healing, they concluded that they were greater than others, and had a right to forbid the man to use the name of Christ in casting out demons, since he was not one of them...since it was also not safe to follow Christ openly, there were also many secret disciples (like Joseph of Arimathea) and it is probably that the man whom the apostles encountered was one of these secret disciples who did not dare to follow Him openly.

There are also those who CLAIM to do good works in Christ’s Name, but while there is lots of ‘planting and watering,’ there is no fruit. Abp. Averky says that if such people are not for Christ, if they are cold and not hot, then it means that inside they are already against Him.

We could also see in this the modern situation of the Orthodox and the Heterodox. Today, it is common for Christians to say that you must belong to THEIR particular denomination or church or else you will not be saved and it is tempting for Orthodox Christians to take a hard line and consider that all heterodox people will not be saved. However, as St. Irenaeus said “We know where the Church is, but we cannot be sure where it is not.” We should therefore focus on our own faith and practice all that the Apostles & Holy Fathers have given us and not judge others, because ultimately, judgement belongs to God alone.