



“As an under-graduate, theologian/author D.A. Carson co- led an evangelistic Bible study. He confessed that whenever he felt out of his depth, he would take skeptics and doubters to a bold witness on campus named Dave. On one such occasion, a young man who was brought to Dave said, "I came from a family that doesn't believe in a literal resurrection and all that stuff. That's a bit much for us. But we're a fine family—a good, church-going family. We love each other, care for each other, and we do good in the community. We're a stable family. So what have you got that we don't have?"

Dave looked at the young man and said, "Watch me. Move in with me. I have an extra bed. Just follow me around. You see how I behave, what's important to me, what I do with my time, the way I talk. You watch me, and at the end of three months you tell me there's no difference."

The young man didn't take Dave up on that offer, but he did keep coming back to watch how Dave lived his Christian life. Eventually the young man came to Christ and went on to become a medical missionary. Carson concluded what he learned from Dave's challenge: A Christian is saying in effect: "I'm one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where there's bread. I drank deeply from the wellsprings of grace. God knows I need more of it. If you watch me you'll see some glimmerings of the Savior, and ultimately you'll want to fasten on him. Watch me." *D.A. Carson's sermon titled "Biblical Authority: The Exclusive Authority of Scripture for Faith and Practice" (2008)*

Last week we looked at the Thessalonian church as a model, a prototype of the kind of global church God wants in today's world. Today in chapter two we see a model of God's kind of servant. Just as Dave said in our opening illustration, we get to "watch" Paul and see how he modeled being a servant discipler. I find his model very challenging, and amazingly relevant.

We start with the model servant who speaks God's truth. Look at chapter 2: 1-6. ² *We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.* ³ *For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.* ⁴ *On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.* ⁵ *You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.* ⁶ *We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.* (NIV)

Notice that Paul's appeal (v.3) *does not spring from error or impure motives. It was not based on pleasing people. He didn't use flattery or a mask to cover greed for power.* In fact, he says they told the Thessalonians God's gospel "in spite of strong opposition." V.2 It was a risk for the disciples. They weren't trying to trick the Thessalonians. Paul said he was speaking as one approved by God. They were talking God's truth.

This is a critical issue today because alternative media offers a choice of facts. That was actually the title of a disturbing article in *The New York Times* on Monday June 12. Here's what part of the article says,

“The Trump-Russia scandal is breaking during a time of informational chaos, when rival versions of reality are fighting for narrative supremacy. The causes are legion: the advent of right wing talk radio and Fox news; the influence of social sites like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and the mainstreaming of conspiracy sites like InfoWars, which had almost 5 million visitors in the last month. By allowing

partisans to live in their separate informational and misinformation bubbles, and, in some cases, to allow real news to be rendered as false- and false news to be rendered as true- they have all contributed to the calcification of the national divide. Mainstream journalism, a shiny and ascendant conveyor of truth during Watergate, is in a battered state after decades of economic erosion, its own mistakes and the efforts of partisan wrecking crews to discredit its work, the most recent one led by the president himself... Now more and more people are looking for information in the media and elsewhere **that will reinforce what they already believe**" (Jim Rutenberg, *Alternative Media Offers a Choice of Facts on Comey*, The New York Times, Business Day, June 12, 2017)

Now that's very scary and yet it is the reality today in our contemporary world. Fake news does often spring from error and greed for power, and God's truth is often a target. There is fake news, fake claims and fake followers.

You can actually pay to have fake followers on Twitter. Twitter hosts an impressive one billion user accounts. Of course, whether half that many people are actually using the service is another question. Some of these accounts might be users who have lost interest, but many of these accounts are fake. It turns out that Twitter is awash in dummy accounts created by computer bots and low-paid workers from Asian nations who work for unscrupulous businesses known as "click farms." These companies pay workers to sit behind computers creating false Twitter accounts and "following" legitimate ones. For instance, a recent article in USA Today reported:

In Indonesia, a social media-obsessed country with one of the world's largest number of Facebook pages and Twitter users, click farms are proliferating. Ali Hanafiah, 40, offers 1,000 Twitter followers for \$10 and 1 million for \$600. He owns his own server, and pays \$1 per month per Internet Protocol address, which he uses to generate thousands of social media accounts. Those accounts, he said, "enable us to create many fake followers."

During an interview Mr. Hanafiah admitted that large social networks can boost a business' public profile. He said, "Today, we are living in a tight competition world that is forcing people to compete with many tricks." But Tony Harris, a social media consultant, warned that "The illusion of a massive following is often just that—[an illusion]." *Daniel James Devine, "Fake Followers," WORLD magazine (6-14-14);* I find that reality morally appalling.

The apostle Paul and his co-ministers never used tricks nor flattery nor impure motives or greed as they presented the gospel. They spoke as people approved by God and trusted with the gospel. This is the first characteristic of God's model servant in this chapter.

David Brooks, in his 2015 book *The Road to Character*, says there are resume virtues and eulogy virtues. Resume virtues feature what's needed for economic success: input leads to output, pursue self-interest, maximize your wealth, impress the world. Eulogy virtues are the deeper virtues—what you want spoken about at your funeral—"whether you are kind, honest, or faithful, what kind of relationships you formed" (pp. xi-xii). What your relationship with God was like.

Verses 7-12 are Paul's eulogy virtues: they describe Paul's agape model of relational discipleship. ⁷ *Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,* ⁸ *so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.* ¹⁰ *You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.* ¹¹ *For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,* ¹² *encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

This is a very people-sensitive model of leadership – not distant but upclose and personal. Look at the adjectives and images:

Like a mother gently caring for her little children...

Like a father encouraging, comforting, urging...

Sharing ourselves because we love you; you had become very dear to us.

Those images speak of transparency and vulnerability- all motivated by God's agape love. Paul was not out to pursue his own self-interest and impress the world. He was not putting on a mask. He was the real thing. Again, in our world today, this runs against cultural trends. Did you know that there is a growing trend in the athletic apparel market? People are buying sports clothing without actually practicing the sport. An article in the Wall Street Journal notes: "the U.S. athletic apparel market will increase by nearly 50 percent to more than \$100 billion at retail by 2020, driven in large part by consumers snapping up stretchy tees and leggings that will never see the fluorescent lights of a gym...Outdoor and camping retailers have debuted new lines of hiking boots and flannel shirts for people who probably have no intention of actually hiking and camping. Retailers are also rolling out jogging pants and preppy, \$90 men's running shorts for men who may never jog." *"Sara Germano, "Yoga Poseurs: Athletic Gear Soars, Outpacing Sport Itself," The Wall Street Journal (8-20-14).* People are choosing to project a false impression. Paul was an authentic servant leader living out God's agape love.

Unfortunately there are mothers and fathers in the real world who also try to project a false image – an image of caring and responsibility yet the dad is never home or the mother is always out shopping or concerned for the family's social status. Deadbeat parents who abandon or neglect their children. But Paul wasn't like that. He lived among his converts and loved them with his whole heart. When they walked away from God, he cried out, as he did to the Galatians: "*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.* Gal.4:19. The pains of childbirth are excruciating. This is labor in its most intense and that is Paul's image for the emotional struggle he felt as the Galatians moved away from the Lord. Paul had a mother's and father's heart, modeled after God's own heart.

Mother Theresa was also the real thing. She made this Pauline model culturally relevant today. She said, "**By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to Jesus.** *Mother Teresa, quoted by Ruth A. Tucker in Guardians of the Great Commission. Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 17.* That is the model I hope we can live by in our multiethnic church, embracing our ethnicity in the context of God's global call yet living with Jesus Christ as the central focus and empowering presence.

This is the model of the Thessalonian church where they had work produced by faith, love that labored for others to the point of weariness, and a hope that endured the persecution and slander against them. This is the authentic model of those empowered by agape love that gives oneself to build up others for the kingdom.

Like a mother gently caring for her little children...

Like a father encouraging, comforting, urging...

Sharing ourselves because we love you; you had become very dear to us.

Is this a model only for exceptional Christians? No; it is God's norm.

I close with this comparison of Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ.

"According to the book *No Ordinary Time*, by Doris Kearns Goodwin, the first peacetime draft occurred October 29, 1940. President Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of War Stimson sat on a stage in a crowded auditorium in Washington, D.C. In the preceding weeks all males between 21 and 35 had been given a draft number, and all those numbers were in cobalt capsules in a

big fishbowl on the stage. Stinson was blindfolded with some yellow linen cloth cut from a chair used at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He reached into the bowl and pulled out the first capsule he touched. He handed it to the President who read into the many microphones before him, "The first number is 158." Goodwin writes: 'No sooner had the president spoken than a women's scream was heard. Seated in the middle of the crowded auditorium, Mrs. Mildred Bell gasped. Her 21-year-old son, Harry, who was supposed to be married the following week, held number 158. Now his future was linked to that of his country. Number 158 was held by some six thousand registrants in different precincts throughout the country, including Cleveland welder Michael Thompson, father of three children; Jack Clardy, a one-armed Negro banjo picker from Charlotte, NC; and unemployed James Cody of Long Island City. In New York, the surnames of those bearing number 158 told a story in themselves: Farrugia, Chan, Re, Weisblum, Tsatsarones, Stoller, Clement. Some were pleased and proud to be the first number called, others said they'd make the best of it, still others were upset at their bad fortune.

But God draws the number of all those he saves. We are called to be salt and light, to be ambassadors and priests, and there are no deferments. We're enlisted to display righteousness in a wicked world, to help the weak and feed the hungry, to represent the Living God, to tell sinners about Jesus. There is no one who is saved **who is not drafted by God to be an agent of grace.**" *Doris Kearns Goodwin, No Ordinary Time (Touchstone, 1994), pp.186-87*

Paul recognized he was drafted by God. Acts 26:16-18: I was "*appointed to be a servant and a witness of what I had seen of Jesus and what Jesus would show me.*" He was sent to the Gentiles to *open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith IN Christ.*"

He fulfilled that call as a model servant – our model today for how demonstrate and share the reality of Christ with others – with integrity, with authenticity as those transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and as lovers of others with God's agape love – like a *mother caring for her little children, like a father, encouraging, comforting, urging, sharing not only the gospel but our own selves because you had become very dear to us.*" I Thes. 2:1-10.

May his model be our model. Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 6/18/17

Song of Response: *Take my Life and let It Be Consecrated, Lord, to thee.*