

Paul the Nursemaid

"But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children." 1 Thessalonians 2:7

Paul uses the word "nurse" rather than "mother" because they are not his children; they belong to God; he merely "nurses" them. This is the tension of the Christian ministry: he is not their mother, but must act like he is in order to serve the One who brought them into this world and gave them life. Paul makes two points in commenting on his relationship with the Thessalonians: 1) - He expressed no concern for his own rights or dignity. He refrained from claiming that which was due to him, namely acknowledgment of his authority as an apostle and proper remuneration for his services. In this he creates the impression of altruism, even though he is ultimately motivated by the eternal. With modesty, he stooped to every kind of menial task.

2) - His affection for them was manifested in his care for them. Like a mother with her child, he was willing to lay out his life for their benefit. As an apostle, Paul was a man of authority; but he always used his authority in love. His desire to protect them can be seen in his words: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."¹ The apostle emulated his Lord Jesus in the way he lived his life.

In our narcissistic society it is rare to find people with this attitude. Even mothers are often too busy with their own lives and concerns to spend themselves for their families. Their careers and personal needs are paramount. Fathers are no better in that under the pretext of providing for their families they give vent to their covetous ambitions by trying to excel in the marketplace.

¹ Colossians 1:24