

1 Thessalonians 2:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile— Paul defends against three accusations. *Planē* (πλάνη, 'deceit/error') suggests doctrinal falsehood; *akatharsias* (ἀκαθαρσίας, 'uncleanness') implies moral impurity, particularly sexual immorality common among traveling 'religious' teachers; *en dolō* (ἐν δόλῳ, 'in guile/trickery') indicates manipulative techniques. Itinerant philosophers and cult leaders in the Greco-Roman world often exploited followers financially and sexually, using clever rhetoric to deceive. Paul categorically denies all three charges.

The negative construction emphasizes what true ministry isn't. Authentic gospel preaching flows from truth (not error), purity (not lustful motives), and transparency (not manipulation). Paul's ministry contrasted sharply with traveling sophists who performed for fees, mystery religions that seduced followers, and charlatan wonder-workers who exploited the gullible. The Thessalonians witnessed ministry motivated by genuine love for souls and passionate commitment to truth, not personal gain or pleasure.

Historical Context

The ancient world teemed with traveling religious teachers and philosophers, many fraudulent. Cynics demanded payment for 'wisdom'; mystery cult leaders promised secret knowledge for initiates (often involving sexual rituals); magicians sold spells and amulets. Against this backdrop, Paul offers free gospel teaching,

moral purity, and transparent motives. His tentmaking (Acts 18:3; 1 Thess 2:9) proved he wasn't in ministry for money. His sexual ethics (4:3-8) demonstrated purity contrasting with pagan license. His public, reasoned teaching from Scripture (Acts 17:2-3) showed transparency, not manipulation.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do contemporary ministries demonstrate freedom from deceit, uncleanness, and guile—or reveal the presence of these corruptions?
2. What safeguards protect gospel ministers from the financial, sexual, and manipulative temptations that plagued ancient (and modern) religious leaders?
3. Why does Paul defend his integrity so extensively? What role does a minister's character play in validating the gospel message?

Interlinear Text

ἡ	γὰρ	παράκλησις	ἡμῶν	οὐκ	ἐξ	πλάνης	οὐδὲ	ἐξ
G3588	For	exhortation	our	was not	of	deceit	nor	of
G1063		G3874	G2257	G3756	G1537	G4106	G3761	G1537
ἀκαθαρσίας	οὐτὲ	ἐν	δόλῳ					
uncleanness	nor	in	guile					
G167	G3777	G1722	G1388					

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 4:2 (Parallel theme): But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but

by manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 2:17 (Parallel theme): For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

2 Corinthians 7:2 (Parallel theme): Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

1 Thessalonians 4:7 (Parallel theme): For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

2 Peter 1:16 (Parallel theme): For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

2 Corinthians 4:5 (Parallel theme): For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

Numbers 16:15 (Parallel theme): And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.

1 Samuel 12:3 (Parallel theme): Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.