

1 Thessalonians 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness—en logō kolakeias (ἐν λόγῳ κολακείᾳς, 'in word of flattery') describes insincere praise designed to manipulate. Ancient sophists flattered wealthy patrons for financial support; Paul flatly denies this practice. Prophasis pleonexias (πρόφασις πλεονεξίας, 'pretext for greed') indicates using ministry as a cover for selfish gain. Paul appeals to two witnesses: the Thessalonians ('as ye know' for observable behavior) and God ('God is witness' for unobservable motives).

Covetousness was particularly tempting for traveling teachers. Lucrative patronage awaited those who told wealthy supporters what they wanted to hear. Paul's refusal to accept support (v. 9) removed even the appearance of mercenary motives. His plain-spoken teaching sometimes offended (Acts 17:5-9) but never deceived. The contrast with greedy false teachers is stark: Paul worked to support himself, lived simply, spoke truth without flattery, and ultimately suffered rather than profited from gospel ministry. His integrity validated his message.

Historical Context

The Greco-Roman world expected religious teachers to seek patronage from wealthy supporters. Philosophers dedicated works to patrons; mystery cult leaders extracted fees from devotees; astrologers and magicians charged for services. Paul's financial independence was radical—he supported himself through

tentmaking (Acts 18:3; 1 Thess 2:9), accepted occasional gifts from established churches (Phil 4:15-16), but never demanded support or used flattery to manipulate donors. This pattern protected gospel ministry from the appearance (and reality) of exploitation.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does contemporary Christian ministry demonstrate freedom from flattery and financial manipulation, or fail to do so?
2. What safeguards protect ministers from using their platform for covetous purposes disguised as spiritual service?
3. Why does Paul appeal to both human observation (for actions) and divine witness (for motives)? What does this teach about accountability?

Interlinear Text

οὔτε γάρ ποτε ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας ἐγενήθημεν
neither For at any time a cloke G3056 flattering used we
G3777 G1063 G4218 G1722 G2850 G1096

καθὼς οἴδατε οὔτε ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας θεὸς
as ye know neither a cloke G4392 of covetousness God
G2531 G1492 G3777 G1722 G4124 G2316

μάρτυς
is witness
G3144

Additional Cross-References

Acts 20:33 (Parallel theme): I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

Romans 1:9 (Witness): For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

2 Corinthians 12:17 (Parallel theme): Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?

Galatians 1:20 (References God): Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

2 Peter 2:3 (Word): And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

2 Peter 2:18 (Word): For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

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 2:10 (Witness): Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

1 Peter 5:2 (References God): Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

Titus 1:7 (References God): For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;