

1 Thessalonians 2:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children— ἔπιοι (ἔπιοι, 'gentle') contrasts sharply with potential harshness or authoritarianism. The metaphor shifts dramatically: *trophos thalpē ta heautēs tekna* (τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἔαυτῆς τέκνα, 'a nursing mother cherishes her own children'). *Trophos* indicates a wet nurse nursing her own infant, not a hired caregiver—intensely personal, tender care. *Thalpō* (θάλπω, 'to cherish/warm/comfort') appears only here and Ephesians 5:29 (how Christ cherishes the church), suggesting tender affection and careful nurture.

Paul could have been authoritarian ('burdensome,' v. 6) but chose gentleness. The nursing mother imagery emphasizes vulnerability, tenderness, and self-sacrifice—she gives from her own body to nurture helpless infants. Apostolic ministry imitates maternal care: gentle, patient, nurturing, personally invested. This tenderness doesn't contradict apostolic authority but expresses it properly. True spiritual fathers (1 Cor 4:15) exercise authority through love, not domination; through service, not exploitation; through gentle nurture, not harsh demands.

Historical Context

Paul's gentle approach contrasted with both harsh Jewish legalism and pagan authoritarianism. Stoic philosophers often treated students with cold indifference; mystery cult leaders wielded manipulative power. Jewish rabbis could be harsh taskmasters. Paul instead offered maternal tenderness, patiently nurturing young

converts through persecution's challenges. This gentleness particularly suited new believers needing comfort and encouragement rather than condemnation. The Thessalonians experienced church leadership as loving family, not institutional hierarchy.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does Christian leadership demonstrate both genuine authority and tender gentleness without compromising either?
2. What does Paul's nursing mother metaphor teach about the emotional investment and personal sacrifice required in spiritual mentorship?
3. In what ways does your exercise of spiritual influence (whether as parent, teacher, leader, or friend) imitate maternal cherishing?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ' ἐγενήθημεν ἥπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν ὡς ἀν
But we were gentle among you even as cherishest
G235 G1096 G2261 G1722 G3319 G5216 G5613 G302

τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα
a nurse G2282 G3588 her G1438 children G5043
G5162

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 2:11 (Parallel theme): As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

Isaiah 66:13 (Parallel theme): As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 49:23 (Parallel theme): And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

1 Corinthians 9:22 (Parallel theme): To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

2 Corinthians 10:1 (Parallel theme): Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

James 3:17 (Parallel theme): But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

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