

1 Thessalonians 2:13
God's Word Through Men

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Prayer:

Gracious God our Father, we come before you today with our Bibles open and our minds and hearts ready to hear what you would say to us through the sacred scriptures. Guide the preacher and the people in our mutual responsibilities – whether it be preaching or receiving the Word of God, that your truth would be proclaimed and received. Grant us the blessing of your Spirit to bring this about, we pray in Jesus' precious name Amen.

Sermon Outline:

I. The preachers' gratitude for the Thessalonians' attitude

A. They thanked God because he was the one who enabled the Thessalonians to receive the Word of God preached by the apostles.

B. Their apostles' gratitude for the Thessalonians' reception of the Word of God was unceasing.

II. The Thessalonians' Reception of the Revelation

A. They "received the Word of God" unreservedly

B. They received it by hearing the apostles' preaching

C. They accepted the apostles' preaching as God's Word even though it was delivered through fellow humans.

They recognized the divine authority of the preached message.

III. The Working of the Word in the Thessalonian believers

It was an internal work.

It was an unceasing work.

IV. The Word Is Working Today

Preachers are to present the Word of God

Congregations are to receive the Word of God.

Sermon begins:

On his second missionary journey around the Mediterranean region somewhere in the years 49-51AD, Paul, along with his co-workers, Timothy and Silas, arrived in the Greek city of Thessalonica. This city is situated in what is now called the country of North Macedonia. It is located on the northern border of Greece and is the country where Alexander the Great was born in 356 BC.

Acts chapter 17 tells us the missionary band went to the Jewish synagogue in the city on three Sabbath Day. Paul, the apostle, preached that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Messiah. Many of the people, both Jews and Gentiles, believed the message and joined the missionaries.

But the Jews in the city became jealous, and stirred up a hostile mob against them, so that they had to escape by night.

But the short ministry of the missionaries had not been in vain. From those who believed the message of the Gospel, a church was formed and to this church Paul, along with his two companions, wrote two letters of apostolic instruction and advice. These two letters are invaluable revelation given from God through Paul, so that the church in all ages might learn more of Christ and his working in our lives as his people.

Our passage today, which is really just one verse, is one of the most precious texts in the Bible because it reveals to us how God communicates to and instructs his people, how he brings them to faith, and how he enables them to grow spiritually as Christians.

We want to see four things today in this passage:

I. The preachers' gratitude for the Thessalonians' attitude

II. The Thessalonians' Reception of the Revelation

III. The Working of the Word in the Thessalonians' Lives

IV. The Word as it Is Working Today

So, first of all:

I. The Preachers' Gratitude for the Thessalonians' Attitude

I am calling this group of three men "the preachers." Only Paul was an apostle; he was the chief spokesman and preacher, but he was supported by the other two men, Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy - so I'm calling all three "the preachers."

There are two things I want to say here about these preachers' gratitude. First of all, they were thankful to God himself for the whole-hearted response of the Thessalonians to the gospel message.

They weren't thankful to the Thessalonians. They didn't say, "Thank you, Thessalonians, for believing the Gospel message." They didn't thank them because they knew the reason they believed the message was not in themselves but it was the initiative and power and purpose of God that caused them to accept and believe the message.

These preachers knew their Reformed theology. They knew that all humankind is dead in sin, condemned by both Adam's sin and their own sin, and these men and woman had no desire or power to lift themselves out of their spiritually dead state. The Gentiles among them were quite happy to keep worshipping pagan idols. God had to move on them first; God had to open up their minds to understand the Gospel. The only reason they responded to the gospel preaching was because God enabled them to believe and respond.

The preachers weren't slapping the Thessalonians on the back and congratulating them for their wisdom and foresight in believing the Gospel. They weren't saying, "Thank you, guys, good job! Thank you for deciding to follow Christ." What they were doing instead was praising God and saying, "Thank you, God, that you had mercy on the Thessalonians and enabled them to repent and believe the Gospel!"

These preachers knew that all their preaching and persuasion would have been to no avail had not the Holy Spirit himself opened the Thessalonians' blind eyes and awakened them from spiritual death. Therefore, Paul and Silvanus and Timothy were singing something like this, "To God be the glory, great things he has done! He has brought these Thessalonians to faith in his Son! Hallelujah!" God was the one glorified, not the Thessalonians. It was the sovereign grace of Almighty God who sent these preachers to them and then opened up their minds to understand the Gospel and commit themselves to Jesus Christ.

It's no different today. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ it's because God brought the gospel to you and by his Spirit woke you up and enabled you to repent of your sins and believe the Gospel. You can't congratulate yourself. You have to congratulate the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have to thank him for his mercy to you.

So these preachers were thankful to God, not to the Thessalonians, because God is the one who saved them.

Secondly, we see that these preacher's gratitude to God for the Thessalonian's acceptance of the Word of God was unceasing. The text says in verse 13, "**we also thank God constantly for this.**"

These missionaries could not get over this. Every time they thought about it, they gave praise to God. At the beginning of this letter we read in chapter one, verse two: ² ***(D) We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly^{a)(E)} mentioning you in our prayers.***

Those three weeks in Thessalonica had paid huge dividends not only for the Thessalonians, but also in the personal lives of these three preachers. Their hearts were filled with gratitude for the rest of their lives when they thought about what God had done among them.

What about us today? We, too, should be thankful for the saving grace of God in believers that we know. People in our family. People in your church. In spite of all their weaknesses and sins, not to mention our own weaknesses and sins, we should thank God for what he's done in the lives of Christians that we know. Where would they be, where would we be, without the mercy of God? To God alone be the glory, now and forever, amen!

So we've seen **The Preachers' Gratitude for the Thessalonians' Attitude**. Let's now turn our attention to the Thessalonians themselves. Let's look at...

II. The Thessalonians' Reception of the Revelation

v. 13 says, "*...when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...*"

- A. They unreservedly received the message of these preachers as "the word of God" because they **recognized its true source was from God himself**.

The Thessalonians recognized that these three preachers were flesh and blood men like themselves: they sweated in the heat and shook in the cold. But they also recognized that the message they preached about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was not a human invention, but it was from God himself.

The words of the Gospel were coming from the mouth of Paul, but they came with power and deep conviction into the souls of the Thessalonians. They were convicted and convinced that Paul spoke the Word and truth of God, that what he said about Jesus was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, that the Messiah, the Christ, really did live and die on a cross bearing the sins of his people, and he really did rise on the third day and he really did ascend into heaven.

The Holy Spirit took the words of Paul about Jesus and about human sin and judgment and salvation, and he drove them deep into the minds and hearts of these Thessalonians. They were convinced and overwhelmed in the realization that they stood naked before the holy God, drenched in all their sin, in need of divine cleansing and mercy.

The reality of God's existence and his holiness and righteousness was poured into their minds. The Word of God came alive to them in convicting power.

And the amazing thing is that this great message of deep, convicting power came through men like themselves. It wasn't angels to who came to Thessalonica, God did not speak from heaven and preach to them, but God in his wisdom and purpose ordained that the saving Gospel message would come to them through the lips of three sinners who'd been saved by the grace of God.

When Paul wrote his letter to Titus, he said this in Titus 1:2-3, - ² ***(D) in hope of eternal life, which God, (E) who never lies, (E) promised (G) before the ages began^[b] 3 and (H) at***

the proper time manifested in his word^(c) through the preaching^(j) with which I have been entrusted^(k) by the command of God our Savior...

How does Paul say God manifested his Word? “At the proper time he manifested it through preaching.” Paul says, “I was entrusted with responsibility. I was given a sacred trust, a sacred treasure, and God commissioned me to deliver this sacred message to the Gentile world.”

Paul said this in 1 Cor. 4:1-2 - ***This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and ^(A)stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.***

What is a steward? In the Biblical world it was someone who was entrusted to run the affairs of a household, to manage the household business. Like Joseph in Egypt became the steward of Potiphar’s household.

Paul is saying that he and his fellow preachers were also stewards. They were given the stewardship of the Gospel message, the only hope for the salvation of lost sinners.

These men were given this responsibility to dispense the message, the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, at this particular three-week period in this northern Greek city of Thessalonica, likely during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero. They were sent by God to preach the Word of God. In the synagogue where they went Paul would have shown them how the OT prophecies of the coming Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

When Paul and his companions put all this together and presented the Gospel of Christ to the Thessalonians they recognized that this was a message from God; it had divine origin. The Holy Spirit was calling them to faith through the preaching of Paul and his companions.

So these people they **recognized that the true source of Paul’s preaching was God himself.**

B. Note, secondly, that **they received the Word of God unreservedly.** In verse 13 we see that Paul states that **they “received” the Word of God.** He also uses a second verb to describe their reception: **“you accepted it.”**

When Paul preached in Athens, for example, there was a mixed reaction by his hearers: We read in Acts 17:32: ³² ***Now when they heard of ^(BM)the resurrection of the dead, ^(BN)some mocked. But others said, ^(BO)“We will hear you again about this.”***

When he arrived in Corinth (Acts 18) he testified to ***“the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said them, ‘...from now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*** (Acts 18:6). But then he got a good response from the Gentiles and stayed there a year and half, “teaching the Word of God to them” (Acts 18:11).

But here in Thessalonica we read of no mixed response, no rejection, no skepticism, but they “received the Word of God” as easily as a thirsty man receives a drink of cold water. They accepted the preaching of the Word of God for what it was – God speaking to them through the messengers, the preachers.

C. They received the Word by hearing the apostles’ preaching

Verse 13 says, “...you received the word of God, which you heard from us...”

This hearing with the ears seems to be fundamentally important to receiving the Word of God into one’s soul. This is not denying that a person could come to Christ by reading scripture or reading a sermon, but the most common and regular way that people come to faith is by hearing the Word of God preached. They hear it in a church service, or they hear it on TV or radio or internet, or they may hear it shared with them by a friend or neighbor – one on one.

Rom. 10:17 - 17 **So ^(A)faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.** This is why it’s important that we speak with people, we share the gospel with them – it’s through our voice, the sound of the Word of God going in their ears and thus to their minds and hearts, that the Word of God penetrates into their inner being.

We also read in Gal. 3:2 - 2 **Let me ask you only this: ^(A)Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by ^(B)hearing with faith?** This hearing the Word of God is used by the Holy Spirit to create faith in our minds and hearts. We hear the Word, the Spirit then takes the Word and waters it like gasoline poured out on a pile of wood which explodes into flame. The Spirit takes the Word and it explodes into true faith in our minds and hearts – we believe in Jesus, we believe he is the Son of God, we believe he died for my sins, we believe he rose from the dead. The Spirit of God welds this faith to our minds and hearts so there is a permanent bond and union between us and our Savior. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to birth faith in our hearts.

D. The Thessalonians accepted the missionaries preaching as God’s Word even though it was delivered through fellow humans.

They recognized the divine authority of the preached message.

This has always been the case in revealed religion, in God’s dealing with humanity through the ages from Adam and Eve down to the present.

- a. *Heb. 1:1 - 1* Long ago, at many times and ^(A)in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

How did God speak to the Hebrew nation in the Old Testament? It was by the prophets. It was God speaking to them. God uses human beings to communicate his message, his Word, to other human beings.

Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe he was a prophet. He was their brother, one of their family members. He was a pious person, yes, but nothing so special as to be a prophet of

God. But they were wrong, they were blind, he was a prophet, indeed more than a regular prophet, but he was the supreme prophets whom Moses said would come and would need to be listened to.

- A. *Matt. 10:19-20* - ^(AE)When ^(AF)they deliver you over, ^(AG)do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for ^(AH)what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ ^(AI)For it is not you who speak, but ^(AJ)the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.
- b. *2 Cor. 13:3* - ³ since you seek proof that Christ ^(E)is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but ^(G)is powerful among you

God uses human beings to communicate his message, his Word, to other human beings.

We have seen:

I. The preachers' gratitude for the Thessalonians' attitude

II. The Thessalonians' Reception of the Revelation

A. They recognized its true source was from God himself.

III. The Working of the Word in the Thessalonian believers

A. It was an internal work.

v. 13: ... "the word of God, which is at work in you believers."

The Word of God did not somehow remain outside of these Thessalonians, they did not keep the Word of God at arms' length, but they took it in to their minds and hearts.

If we have a beautiful mean spread before us, we can't let it just sit on the table, we have to begin eating it – tasting it, chewing it, swallowing it, so that we not only enjoy it but it does some good health wise – it nourishes us and keeps us alive and gives us energy and strength.

We have to receive the Word of God and take it into our inner being. There it will do it's great sanctifying work, changing us, renewing us more into the image of our Savior.

Heb. 4:12 - ¹² For ^(A)the word of God is living and ^(B)active, ^(C)sharper than any ^(D)two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and ^(E)discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This was the word of God that was "at work" in the Thessalonians. It was an internal work.

B. It was an unceasing work.

Phil. 1:6 - And I am sure of this, that he who began a good **work in you** will bring it to completion **at** the day of Jesus Christ.

Psa. 138:8 - The Lord will (A) fulfill his purpose for me;
 (B) your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.
 Do not forsake (C) the work of your hands.

C. It was a powerful work.

Eph. 1: 19-29 ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, (D) according to the working of (E) his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ (E) when he raised him from the dead and (G) seated him at his right hand (H) in the heavenly places,

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IV. The Word Is Working Today

A. *Preachers are to set forth the Word of God before the people.*

*1 Tim. 4:13 - Until I come, devote yourself to the **public reading** of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*

Eph. 4:11-13 - ¹¹ And (AA) he gave the (AB) apostles, the prophets, the (AC) evangelists, the (AD) shepherds^[c] and teachers, ^[d] ¹² (AE) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for (AF) building up (AG) the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to (AH) the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, (AI) to mature manhood, ^[e] to the measure of the stature of (AJ) the fullness of Christ,

Pastors in Christ's churches, as under shepherds of Christ, have been called by God to teach and preach God's Word. They are to feed God's sheep with the healthy diet of the Word of God. This is a great challenge and awesome responsibility.

All faithful pastors want to feed their people the Word of God. Pray for them, pray for me, that I can more and more do that.

B. *Congregations also have an awesome responsibility: they are to receive the Word of God as the Thessalonians did, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God.*

When I or Wayne or whoever may be preaching from this pulpit, speaks from the Word of God, when we are teaching accurately and faithfully what the Word of God is saying, it is your responsibility to hear it with the intention of implementing it, believing it, obeying it.

The faithful preaching of the Word of God by ministers of the Word is the way God instructs us in the true faith and builds us up and equips us to believe what is correct and put it into practice.

The public pastoral ministry of the Word is a chief means for the people of God to grow in their understanding of the Scriptures, and grow in their personal relationship with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ.

Let us all be diligent in our respective calling and responsibilities: to faithfully teach and preach the Word of God, and then to hear it and receive it wholeheartedly.

Thus will God's purposes for the maturing of his people in the faith be carried out.

Let the pastors preach the Word of God; let the people hear and receive that Word. For it is through human beings that God communicates his will and truth to other human beings.

Glory to God for his kindness, that he would so provide for the care of his beloved sheep.

Let us pray:

Gracious Father, in your divine wisdom you provided the chief means by which your people will be built up in their holy faith – it is by the pastoral ministry of the preaching of the Word of God. Help us be faithful and alert, as pastors and people, to teach and receive the Word of God – holding it sacred – in its proclamation and its reception into our minds and hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Acts 17:11 - Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all **eagerness**, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so

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