

Accepting the Word of God
1 Thessalonians 2:13

Introduction

There are several reasons that I am an expositional preacher with the primary one being that I want to be accurate to the word of God, and that cannot be done without proper exegesis - study of the passage in its proper historical and grammatical context so that the interpretation is coming from out of the text. The goal is to know and understand what God has said on a subject. The contrast to that is called eisegesis in which passages are picked and interpreted to fit the thoughts and ideas the pastor already had about a subject. Tragically, there is much more eisegesis that occurs in the pulpits of America than exegesis, so it is no wonder that Biblical literacy is so low in our nation, and that has a lot of very negative consequences.

I have found that going through a Biblical book chapter by chapter and verse by verse is a great aide in both keeping the context in view so that the sermons are exegetical in explaining what God has said and preventing eisegetical sermons of personal opinion. I have also found that book studies are also helpful in making sure that the whole counsel of God is covered since difficult and uncomfortable passages must be examined. There are things that God has revealed in the Scriptures that are hard to understand and things He commands that are difficult to do since they are contrary to natural human selfish desires and also require reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide and empower in order for them to be carried out. This practice is also a good preventative measure to keep the pastor from riding his favorite hobby horses to death in speaking about just what interests him. And personally, I find it also makes it easy to know what the next sermon will be on since it will simply be the next passage in the book currently being studied. Those are a lot of reasons that I am glad to be in a study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

However, in saying all of this, I also recognize that a good pastor must also assess the needs within the congregation both in terms of particular subjects they would like to understand and in addressing the circumstances of life that arise that the congregation will need direction from the Scriptures in how to respond properly. It is for those reasons that after seven years in the four Gospels, I spent nine months this year in preaching exegetical topical sermons on subjects I was asked to address and additional ones as fear of disease and politics has already radically changed our manner of living - hence the reason I have been preaching outside for six months.

In addressing these issues I have been accused of giving my "opinion" and becoming "political." I will state again as I have in the past, while I would very much desire to keep politics out of the pulpit, when political parties and politicians advocate and do what God has clearly declared to be evil, then I am responsible for pointing that out lest any of you follow their evil and also that they might repent. That is the reason I warned before the election that the platform of the Democratic party could only be described as evil, and every year there are fewer candidates within that party that still have moral integrity because they are replaced in the primaries by those that follow the party's platform of abortion, euthanasia, and sexual deviancy. Every day more comes out about widespread, flagrant and massive voter fraud, but it is no surprise that those who advocate what are abominations before God would also lie and cheat. That does not make the Republicans to be saints, but the moral difference in the platforms this year were the greatest that I have ever seen in the two major political parties.

As far as my "opinion" expressed in any of my sermons, you are welcome to ignore it. However, if I have been faithful to explain the text of the Scriptures, then you must examine your own heart to make sure it is not your own "opinion" that is blocking you from understanding and following God's word. If it is my "opinion" on non-Biblical matters, then it is an issue of my own training, research and integrity.

You are welcome to ignore it, but I caution you to make sure you have done your own extensive research before you do, and when you do, I would like to hear what you have learned because my quest is truth. In fact, often it is my great hope that my personal opinions will be wrong, for the conclusions of my research often grieve me. A case in point is COVID-19, media hype and governmental reactions.

I do not find it surprising in the least that the number of people who are testing for trace amounts of SARS-CoV-2 and those with COVID-19 have been going up since October 1 since 1) A lot more people are being tested for the virus (not the disease), and 2) A second wave was expected to come that would coincide with the normal cold and flu season when people spend more time indoors and become generally less healthy. The current rolling average in our county is 3.8% up from about 1% during the Summer and a fatality rate of 1.5% with 19 people dying in the last 7 weeks which of course includes all co-morbidities which has been running about 90% of cases in NY. In other words, the vast majority of these people died with COVID-19, and not of COVID-19.

Far worse than this bad cold has been the government over reaction leading to a far larger increase in deaths due to suicide, domestic violence, delayed or canceled medical care, and stressed induced illnesses due to such things as isolation, fractured personal relationships and loss of business or employment. It has not surprised me that governments are going back to severe restrictions since it is a key way for want-to-be dictators to continue their authoritarian rule. What has surprised me is how complacent so much of the population has been to these dictates. However, neither our Governor nor government is God, and they have proven they do not know how to run an economy, protect people from the virus, or help those who are sick recover. They have done the opposite with restrictions on businesses which are resulting in impoverishment and starvation. WHO is estimating that around 130 million will starve to death due to government actions related to fear of COVID-19. Study after study have shown the mask mandates are not helpful and probably detrimental (graph) since they give a false sense of security and most people do not use a mask that would be protective nor use them correctly. And many governments have blocked the medications that have been shown in multiple studies to reduce morbidity in those with COVID-19.

This is my opinion, but I think you will find it sound advice. Do you want to avoid getting a bad case of COVID-19? Then two things are primary. 1) Keep your immune system in top shape with a healthy diet, exercise and supplemental vitamins and minerals. 2) Reduce your exposure to viral inoculation. The primary means of that is washing or disinfecting your hands before and after going to public places or being exposed to anything that might be contaminated. Proper masks used correctly at the right time in the right place could be helpful, but incorrect use and concentrating any virus you may have in front of your nose increases your risk of developing it. If you are at high risk due to co-morbidities, then reduce exposure to public situations, but be mindful that isolation risks your mental health.

Fear of disease, government restrictions and political turmoil have made 2020 an unprecedented year in many respects, but only in the specifics of the hardships being faced, not in the general case of troubles and trials being part of life. Many generations that have gone before us have faced much worse as those who live in other nations do in the present. The Pilgrims faced much more daunting prospects four hundred years ago when they arrived in Cape Cod in 1620. They did not know the land, they did not know whether the natives would be friendly or hostile, they were going to have to build shelter for themselves from scratch, and they were going to be short of food since they did not have the people or the supplies that had been on the Speedwell that had turned back due to sabotage. Disease broke out in early December and decimated their ranks over that next Winter and Spring. They would hold a Thanksgiving feast the next October, but their true gratefulness to God was shown in their worship and praise of Him throughout even of the worst of times they had experienced. That is a good reminder for us as we head to Thanksgiving this coming Thursday. Times are strange, but we have much for which to be thankful. Among those reasons is the one that Paul mentions in 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Review

Let me quickly review what we have already seen in our study of 1 Thessalonians so that we can set this verse in its proper context. The church in Thessalonica was started in the midst of much opposition. Paul and his companions had arrived there after Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. After establishing a church there, they moved west and came to Thessalonica. Acts 17 records that they taught in the synagogue for three sabbaths resulting in some of the Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women being persuaded to believe and follow Paul and Silas. That sparked some of the other Jews to become jealous and they eventually started an uproar which made the situation there dangerous enough that the brethren sent Paul & Silas away to Berea - where they started another church. The jealous Jews from Thessalonica found out and came to Berea and stirred up trouble again resulting in Paul being sent to Athens.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians was the result of the report he had received from Timothy about how they were doing. He begins his letter with thanksgiving to God for their work of faith, their labor of love, and their steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus (1:3). Paul cites the evidence of these things in their turning from their idols to serve the living and true God and waiting for the return of Jesus from heaven (1:9-10). He also cited how they had become imitators of them by receiving the gospel in the midst of tribulation and becoming examples to those to the east and west in Macedonia and to the south in Achaia. News about what had been happening among them spread wherever ships from Thessalonica sailed (1:6-9). All of these things were evidence that they were indeed among God's elect (1:4).

In chapter 2 Paul gives a defense of the motives and ministry he and his companions had among them by contrasting it with the religious hucksters that were common at the time and preyed upon ignorant and superstitious people. Paul knew that false teachers and wolves would come in the future and he wanted the Thessalonians to know the characteristics of those that came from God and those that did not. Paul and his companions came with the gospel of Jesus Christ with the simple motive to please God whom they served. They came with a message that was true, pure and without deceit. They came to give instead of exploit for the sake of finances, personal pleasure or glory. Their actions among them proved their motives, for instead of collecting anything from them for their support, which they had a right to do, they worked with their own hands to support themselves. They were as gentle and caring among them as a nursing mother is with her child. They behaved devoutly, uprightly and blamelessly toward them, and they were like a father to them exhorting, encouraging and imploring them to walk in a manner worthy of their calling by God.

Thankfulness

Paul began his letter stating that he and his companions gave thanks to God for the Thessalonians and here in 2:13 he states that a second time and then shifts the focus back to the Thessalonians. *"For this reason"* or *"and because of this"* *"we also constantly thank God . . ."* Notice once again that the thanksgiving is to God for what occurred among the Thessalonians and not to the Thessalonians themselves. They were grateful to God for the blessing that He was giving to them. Note as well that this is something they are doing constantly with the particular word here (ἀδιαλείπτως / adialeiptōs) also translated as "without ceasing." He used this same word back in 1:3 with reference to their praying for them "constantly bearing in mind" the Thessalonians work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus. Paul also used this word in Romans 1:9 and he will use it again in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. The context of all of these uses is related to prayer. In none of these passages is Paul saying that the only thing he does is pray for the particular group mentioned. That would be

contradictory to all of the other statements Paul makes about other things he does. We get a better sense of what Paul means by looking more closely at this compound word. The prefix “a” negates the meaning of the root words which mean by or through lack or falling short. In brief, they were not lacking or falling short in thanking God for His work among the Thessalonians.

That is a claim that is easy to make but hard to do unless you have the right mindset about the purpose of your life. Paul and his companions set a good example of this as already explained in the first part of this chapter in the defense of their motives and example of ministry. They had left family, friends and home to travel to distant places at great danger to themselves in order to serve and please God. The only personal gain they would have is the joy of seeing God at work in those who received and believed the gospel message. Paul will express this idea more directly at the end of the chapter. Paul understands that they are only vehicles through which God would do his work, so the gratefulness is that God is using them to accomplish His work in others. There is no lack in their thanking God for they are seeing that He is fulfilling His purposes through them which means that the purpose of their lives is also being fulfilled.

If you view your life as what is in it for you, then any thankfulness is only going to be related to what God has done for you. And while there is plenty in just that to be thankful all the time, the normal human bent toward selfishness reduces that thankfulness to current circumstances. If things are going the way you like, then you are thankful. If they are not going so well, then you are not thankful or you express it without heart. If you view the purpose of your existence as directly tied to the glory of God, then there is genuine thankfulness about how He is using you even if those circumstances are difficult (See Phil. 1). Paul and his companions had no lack in their gratitude to God because they were seeing God working through them for the benefit of the Thessalonians. The hardships they had suffered were more than worth it in order to be used by God in this way and to see His hand at work.

Developing this same mindset in your own life will change how you live because it changes the purpose you have in everything. It will change your marriage, family relationships, friendships, how you work and perhaps even what kind of work you do and where you live. While it is easy to point out the necessity for this for missionaries and pastors to be successful in what God calls them to do, it is actually necessary for every Christian, for every believer is called by God to serve Him with whatever gift, ministry and empowerment He gives to the individual. Do you give thanks to God for His use of you in the lives of others for His glory? Or do you lack? If you do, then what needs to change so that you are not falling short? Keep in mind that a change in attitude will affect your actions.

Receiving the Word

Paul expresses the specific reason for their thankfulness to God in the next phrases in this verse. “. . . *that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God . . .*”

Receive (παραλαμβάνω / paralambanō) in this context is to “welcome or receive authoritative teaching” in the same way Paul used the term in 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1,3; Gal 1:9, 12; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess. 4:1; and 2 Thess 3:6 with reference to doctrines such as Communion, the Resurrection, the Gospel, and walking properly with the Lord.

What they had received was “*the word of God*” that they had heard from the missionaries. At minimum this includes the gospel of Christ since Paul mentions it specifically five times in the first two chapters. In 1:5 he describes the gospel coming to them not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit. In 2:2 he reminds them that they had come with boldness in God to speak the gospel of God amid much opposition. In 2:4 Paul spoke to them the gospel which had been entrusted to them by God in order to please God. In 2:8 he points out that they had imparted to them not only the gospel, but also their own lives. And in 2:9 Paul reminds them that they proclaimed the gospel of God to them while working to support themselves so that they would not be a financial burden.

However, since Paul had reasoned in the synagogue for three weeks and then taught those that were persuaded for an unspecified amount of time, there was probably a large range of doctrine that had been taught and received. We know from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 that he had taught them about basics of how to walk with God and please Him as well as proper behavior with one another. We also know from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 that they had been taught about what would happen in the last days when the day of the Lord would come. For this reason, I believe that Paul uses the phrase “the word of God” to refer to this wider range of doctrine that he taught and not just the gospel alone though that would have been the beginning of what they had taught to and had been received by the Thessalonians.

Paul states that not only had they received the word of God, but they also accepted it. The word here, δεχομαι / dechomai, has a meaning in this context of “to readily receive information and regard it as true” (Louw-Nida). TDNT points out that when used in relationship to receiving the gospel or the word of God as it is in Acts 8:11 of the Samaritans and Acts 11:1 of the Gentiles, and here of the Thessalonians, it is an equivalent of faith. They received and believed, hence they accepted the message. The form here is an aorist middle indicative reflecting the reflexive nature of the verb as a response to action. The word of God was proclaimed to them and they responded by accepting the message as true. This is in keeping with saving faith which is a response of man to the actions of God upon Him.

What do I mean by that? Paul uses this same word in 1 Corinthians 2:14 stating that *“a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”* It is the Holy Spirit’s work to bring a man to conviction of his sin, of righteousness and judgment (John 16:8) so that a man will repent, and to quicken his spirit so that man will believe (Eph. 2:5). I pointed this out in my earlier sermon on 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 as one of the evidences of God’s election. Sinful man will not initiate seeking God because it is contrary to his nature in the same way that a thief does not search for the police. Man responds to the work of God upon him.

It was the work of the Holy Spirit in them that caused them to recognize that what the missionaries were proclaiming was not the word of men like they would have heard from any of the pagan priests, the philosophers or the religious hucksters of that time. We have plenty of equivalents of such people in our own time and tragically many of them are false teachers who profess to be Christian ministers. The musings of men may be interesting, but ultimately they are proven to be false because they lack origin in the God of truth.

Paul makes an emphasis here that they had accepted their message because it truly is the word of God. Contrary to the theories of secular philosophers and liberal religious academics, the Bible did not originate with men. As Paul states it in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* God worked through humans, but He is the author. As stated here it is inspired - literally, breathed out, by God. 2 Peter 1:20-21 explains, *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”* That is why Jesus could say in Matthew 5:18 that *“not the smallest letter or stroke of the Law of God would pass away until all was accomplished.”* It why Jesus said in John 17:17 that *“Thy word is truth.”*

Paul does not say how the Thessalonians knew what the missionaries were proclaiming was the word of God, but in some manner they did know. Whatever speculation is made about that eventually it will come down to the Holy Spirit revealing it to them. Recall in Matthew 16:16-17 that when Peter said that Jesus was *“the Christ the Son of the living God,”* Jesus responded that flesh and blood did not reveal that to him but rather His Father who is in heaven. Many of you have expressed in your testimonies similar experiences in which you heard the gospel and suddenly knew that what was being said was true. For some that occurred upon hearing it the first time, and others only after hearing it multiple times, but then what had not made sense before made perfect sense. That is somewhat mystical, but I believe that

matches Romans 8:16, *“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,”* and 1 John 5:10 *“The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.”* Your salvation experience may not have been like that, mine was not, but most Christians have had similar experiences in which the Holy Spirit confirms as true or rejects as false some message you are hearing even though you did not know exactly why at the time. Further investigation in examining the Scriptures confirms what had been simply an inner sense.

But this brings up Paul’s commendation of the Bereans in Acts 17:11. Paul uses the same terms in describing them as he did the Thessalonians in their acceptance of the word. However, he also states the Bereans were noble-minded because they also examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was proclaiming was so. Relying on an inner sense can be very dangerous. You need to check whatever is being proclaimed against the Scriptures. Our quest must be for truth, for truth invariably leads us to God for He is the God of truth, Jesus is the truth, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth.

The Work of the Word

Paul’s concludes this verse with a phrase upon which he will expand in the rest of the passage - *“which also performs its work in you who believe”* or *“which also works in you who are believing.”* The word “work” here (ἐνεργέω / *energeō*) is the root for our word “energy.” The verb is a present middle indicative indicating its work is currently going on and it is both passive and active. From a passive standpoint it bears witness of God’s character, nature and actions in history and foretells what He will do in the future. Jesus said in John 5:39 that the Scriptures testify about Him. From the passive side then, it is a book to be studied in order to increase your knowledge. It is a book for which academic training can help you overcome barriers such as language and historical setting in order to understand it better, and it is certainly a book that will stretch you intellectually. However, it is not a book designed for academics nor is its purpose intellectual exercise for its work is also active.

Consider the statement in Hebrews 4:12, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* The Holy Spirit uses it to change you as described in Psalm 19. It restores the soul; makes wise the simple; rejoices the heart; enlightens the eyes; warns of evil, and gives great reward to those that keep its precepts.

Paul concludes that this is the work of the word of God in those who are believing. It stands as a witness to God and all that He has done, but its message is hidden from those that will not come to Christ and believe. The warning in Isaiah 6:9-10 is repeated in several places about those whose ears are dull and eyes are dim so that they listen but do not perceive and look but do not understand. Jesus quoted this passage in Matthew 13 in explaining to the disciples why He spoke in parables. It revealed truth to those that would believe and hid it from those that would not. Which group are you in?

Conclusions

Paul and his companions were thankful to God because He was using them to glorify Himself and further His kingdom. They rejoiced that the purpose of their lives was being fulfilled as they saw God using them in the lives of the Thessalonians who received and accepted the Word of God and had their lives changed.

What do you believe the purpose of your life to be? Is it similar to the example set by Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy? Or is it still wrapped up with your own selfish desires whatever those might be? The godly never lack in gratitude for God regardless of their circumstances. The selfish and the ungodly lack in thankfulness to God, and what gratitude they do have is wrapped up in getting what they want.

How have you responded to the word of God? Do you recognize it for what it actually is, or do you erroneously still consider it to be the writings of mere mortal men?

What work is the word of God performing in you? What are you learning about God as you study it? Or are you neglecting to even read it? How is it changing your life and helping you to develop a more Christ like character? If that is not happening, then why? And what needs to change in your life so that it will?

If you recognize you have a need this morning whether that is a word of encouragement and someone to pray with, someone to explain more about how to know and walk with Christ, or to help you overcome some problem, as always, our church leaders are ready and available to help. Please see me or any of our church leaders after the service.

Sermon Notes - November 22, 2020
Accepting the Word of God - 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Introduction

Exegesis vs Eisegesis

Book Studies

Topical Sermons

Political Issues

Faithful exposition, Qualified Opinion & the Quest for Truth

SARS-CoV-2 Round 2

Government solutions are _____ than the disease

Keep your _____ system healthy and wisely reduce your exposure to viral inoculation

Hardships of 2020 vs. 1620

Review

Acts 16-17 - hardships & establishing churches

1 Thess. 1: Thankful to God for the Thessalonians' Response

1 Thess. 2: Pure Motives & Godly Ministry

Thankfulness - 1 Thessalonians 2:13a

Giving thanks to God

Not lacking in prayer or thanksgiving

Missionaries Example of Purpose in Life

Thankfulness & Purpose in Life

Purpose in life and Manner of life

Receiving the Word - 1 Thessalonians 2:13b

Receive (παράλαμβάνω / paralambanō): welcome authoritative _____

The Word of God: the gospel (1:5; 2:2, 4, 8 & 9) and _____ (4:1-8; 5:1-2)

Accept (δεχομαι / dechomai): readily receive information and regard as _____

The _____ of man to the actions of God - 1 Cor. 2:14 (the natural man).

John 16:8 (conviction by the Holy Spirit). Eph. 2:1, 5 (Man is dead, the Holy Spirit quickens).

The words of _____: philosophers, false religions, religious hucksters

The Origin of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21

Revelation from the Holy Spirit - Matthew 16:16-17

The witness of the Spirit - Romans 8:16; 1 John 5:10

More _____ - the Bereans who accepted but also searched the Scriptures

The Work of the Word - 1 Thessalonians 2:13c

Work (ἐνεργέω / energeō - energy) Present Middle Indicative: the work is _____ passive and active

Passive: the Word bears _____ of God's character, nature and actions

Active: Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 19 - the Holy Spirit actively _____ it to change you

His Word works in those _____, but its message is hidden from those that do not (Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13)

Conclusions

The missionaries were thankful to _____ for using them to glorify Himself and further His kingdom

The Thessalonians received and accepted the Word of God

The Word worked in their lives changing how they lived

How has the Word worked in your life? What is the _____ of your thankfulness to God?

KIDS KORNER – Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. Young Children – draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. Older Children – Do one or more of the following: 1) How many times are the word "thankful" is used. 2) Talk with your parents about what makes you thankful to God

THINK ABOUT IT – Questions to consider in understanding the sermon and its application. What is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis? What are the benefits of studying the Bible book by book? What is the necessity of also doing topical studies. When should "politics" be avoided in the church and when must it be addressed? What are the differences between faithful exposition of Scripture, qualified opinion and personal opinion? Which has been proven to be more dangerous: SARS-CoV-2 or Government reaction to it? Explain. What are the most effective ways to keep from getting sick and still live a normal life? What hardships did the Pilgrims face in 1620/21? Why were they thankful? What opposition did the missionaries face in planting churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea? Why did Paul write a letter to the Thessalonians? For what was he thankful to God about them? What were the motives and manner of ministry of the missionaries? What did that prove? What did Paul mean that he "continually" gave thanks to God for the Thessalonians? What enabled him to have such an attitude when circumstances were difficult? How can that be true in your own life? What does it mean that they "received" the word of God? What does the word of God refer to in this verse? What does it mean that they "accepted" their teaching as the word of God? What is the significance of the middle tense of this verb? How is salvation both passive and active? What demonstrated the Bereans more noble-minded? In what ways does the Word work passively? In what ways does the Word work actively? How did the Word work in the Thessalonians? How does it work in your own life?