

May 12, 2019

## **The Word at Work** **1 Thessalonians 2, 13-16**

Our sermon text this morning will be First Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 13 to 16. First Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 13 to 16. Before we read that portion of God's word, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, as we come now to hear from your word, and as I seek and hope to teach your word accurately and carefully, I pray, Lord, you would help me as I speak. Help us all as we hear. May we be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

First Thessalonians chapter 2, reading verses 13 to 16. Hear the word of God: <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, <sup>15</sup>who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind <sup>16</sup>by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!" Amen. And may God bless His word to us.

In our text this morning, Paul returns once again to thanksgiving. He's mounted his defense of himself, Silvanus, and Timothy, and their preaching of the gospel, reminding the Thessalonians that as they very well know, Paul and friends did not come to them seeking money, seeking gold, seeking glory. They came to them with a message—a message of salvation from vain works. They came to them preaching the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Just looking back at chapter 1, verse 5: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." They came to them preaching the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul, in First Thessalonians chapter 1, had a very long passage of thanksgiving. He was thanking God because they received the word in affliction, in the joy of the Holy Spirit. They received the word in such a way that they immediately began preaching the word—chapter 1, verse 8—preaching the word to all of the cities and towns in the regions around them. And they cast off idols, they turned from idols. Looking at chapter 1 and verse 9, they turned from idols to the service of the living God, to await the return of Jesus, who had been raised from the dead and who delivered them from the wrath to come.

Paul returns, as I've said, to thanksgiving, and this time he's giving thanks specifically for the way in which the Thessalonians have received the word of God, and he's giving thanks for the fact that they received this word from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. They received the word from those whom God had sent to preach. He also gives thanks for the evidence of the reception of the word. He's giving thanks for the fact that, having received the word, they become imitators

of other churches, other Christians, and included in that imitation is the imitation of the people who preach. They became imitators of all that is good in the church of Christ, in the church of God, and they became willing to suffer for the gospel. They became willing to suffer for the word of God.

What we're reading here in chapter 2, the thanksgiving of chapter 2, can't be disassociated from the thanksgiving of chapter 1. Paul's thanksgiving in chapter 1 is that they had received the Holy Spirit. The word had come to them in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. He now gives thanks that they have received the word of God, which is at work in them.

The first thing that I want you to notice is that you don't receive the Holy Spirit apart from receiving the word of God. Now it's a popular myth in the church today and in churches all over Australia that if you insist that a person submits to the word of God and receives the word of God, what you're doing is, you're going to the letter and the law, not the Spirit.

And people will tell you that you're grieving the Holy Spirit and that you're against the Spirit because of this insistence that the word is the word of God. And the thought seems to be that you can be Spirit-filled and you can be this wonderful, powerful Holy-Spirit filled Christian serving God, and at the same time, you play fast and loose and free with the word of God.

One of my sons recently, upon the invitation of a friend, attended a church service that that person invited him to, and it was—and I'll say this—it was way out there on the fringes Pentecostal. Now not all Pentecostal churches are this crazy or are this insane, but this one was certainly way out there on the insane fringe of Pentecostalism, and one of the things that the pastor said in that church in his sermon was that the Bible is a word that's two thousand years old. What you need to listen to today is the word of the Holy Spirit that comes to you through someone who has the anointing of the Holy Spirit (obviously speaking of himself)—“What you need to listen to is the anointed word that you are receiving from me.”

I praise God that my son had the discernment to realize that he was listening to a heretic, and he actually had the courage to tell his friend that if she continues to follow this man, he will lead her to hell, because she is not hearing the gospel from this man. Thank you, Lord, for the wisdom of that boy, because I can't claim the credit for it myself. God has worked in his heart, but everything he said about that man is true, if that is what the man said—and I believe my son—that man is a fool. Now as I said, he's way out there on the fringes and on the extreme. But there are plenty of churches that play fast and loose with the word of God, and they believe that you set the Holy Spirit over and against the word of God. That is not what Paul does. That is not what the apostles do. That is not what Jesus does.

So when they play fast and loose with the word of God, for example, you'll hear all kinds of strange things coming from their mouths. They'll go to the book of Galatians, where Paul says there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, etc., etc., and they'll say, Therefore, as there is no distinction, all the commandments concerning the roles of men, the roles of women, etc., etc.,

they're all gone out the window, and women can be pastors, ministers, whatever; men must sit under the authority of a woman if a woman has the necessary gifting, etc., etc., etc.

You see, they're playing fast and loose with the word of God. It's amazing—the things that Paul wrote about the role that a woman has in churches, he wrote *after* he wrote the book of Galatians. So apparently, the Holy Spirit in around about 45 A.D. was saying one thing, and then between 45 to 60 A.D., He changed His mind to say a number of other things. If you believe that about God, straight up, straight out, my friend, you are a fool. God's truth is God's eternal truth. God is not a self-contradictory idiot. The Holy Spirit is not a self-contradictory fool.

Paul meant one thing in one part of the letter of Galatians. What was he speaking about? Justification. My friends, male or female, Jew or Greek, how does one become a Christian? You put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and you repent of your sins. That's what he was saying. And we're all worshipers, full-blooded worshipers, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every convert is a member of the kingdom of God. Every convert is an adopted son of God. Every true Christian has had to be cleansed by the blood of the Son of God.

Our equality is this—we are born sinners and we need the same Savior, and we need to be saved through the same saving faith, the same grace of God. But he's not denying God's ordained roles of manhood and womanhood. That's just an example.

My friends, the most spiritual people in the world are the people who have been most conditioned by, taught by, and basically conformed to, the word of God. They are the most spiritual people in the world, and that's it. And the only way that one can be taught by, conditioned by, and conformed to the word of God is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We're people with brains. God gave us a mind, the ability to think, the ability to have abstract thoughts, to take something and understand something, to study. And then He gave us this book filled with words, and abstract thoughts, and things that are worthy of study, and interesting. Gee, do you think God knew what He was doing? He wants us to study His word. He wants us to study the word that He has given us.

Now in our passage, Paul is speaking of His spoken word. He, Silvanus, and Timothy went to the Thessalonians and they preached the word of God. But turn in your Bibles to Second Peter chapter 3. That which was spoken became enscriptured. It was written for us. Were the apostles aware that they spoke the word of God? Yes. Paul says in First Thessalonians he was perfectly aware that in preaching he was speaking the word of God. When they wrote their letters, were they aware that they were writing the word of God? Well, let's read what Peter says. Second Peter chapter 3, we'll start reading at verse 15:

“<sup>15</sup> And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”

Notice what's so important there. In First Thessalonians, Paul says that in his preaching, he *spoke* the word of God, and in Second Peter, Peter says that in Paul's writing, he *wrote* the word of God. Paul spoke the word of God, he wrote the word of God, "as they do the other Scriptures." What does that mean? Well, Peter is obviously saying that Paul's writings are Scriptures. Paul's writings are Scriptures.

Now what would Peter mean by that? Well, if you went to Peter and asked him, let's say in 29 A.D. or 30 A.D., "What are the Scriptures, Peter?" Peter would say "There are scrolls that are preserved in the temple. Those scrolls have been written by the prophets, and those scrolls are the word of God, and they are the Scriptures." They're the Scriptures. They are the eternal word of God.

Now we come to Second Peter, probably written not long before he died, around 57, 58 A.D. That's kind of academic guesswork; I don't know that for a fact, I just get it from my reading. And what does Peter say the Scriptures are? Well, he's still saying the Scriptures are the scrolls that were held in the temple that were the writing of the prophets, but now the Scriptures also include the writings of the apostles. The things which Paul wrote, Peter counts as Scripture.

I think it's only a reasonable inference to draw from what he's saying that he therefore considers the things which he himself was writing were counted as Scripture, and the things that John wrote were to be counted as Scripture, and the things that Jude wrote were to be counted as Scripture, and the things that Luke and Mark and Matthew wrote were to be counted as Scripture.

Luke and Mark themselves were not necessarily apostles, but they were of that era, and they were associated very closely with the apostles. Luke traveled with Paul. Mark, it appears, was Peter's personal secretary. They wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were chosen vessels of God. God breathed out His Scripture through them. To submit to the Holy Spirit, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, is in a way to be filled with the word of God.

We won't chase up the references this time, but remember this. There are two parallel references. One's to be found in Colossians, one's to be found in the book of Ephesians. In the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul says, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit," and he speaks of singing Psalms one to another, etc., etc. In the book of Colossians, he says, "Be filled with the word of God," to exactly the same effect—singing Psalms one to another, etc., etc. To be filled with the Spirit, to be filled with the word of God—it's the same issue.

It's a lie that a person can be a Christian and not be in submission to the word of God. Can a new convert have many issues to deal with and much to learn? Of course a new convert has many issues and much to learn. Can a new convert be undergoing a personal struggle because they've spent twenty years in a State education system that has taught them everything the opposite to what the word of God says? Of course they can have many struggles in that area.

But those who are of God, those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, those who have truly received the Spirit of God, must be on a journey. They must be on a journey where their thoughts are being conformed to the thoughts of God, where they are learning to think the thoughts of God, after God, where every thought is being taken into captivity to the word of God, to quote other places in Scripture very loosely. They must be on a journey where their reverence for and their obedience to the word of God is growing. And the faster they can get over those stumbling blocks and those troubles, the better it will be for them in their Christian life. There is no such thing as a Spirit-filled Christian who does not love the word of God. It's a lie.

Let's get down and into our text, starting at verse 13: "And we also thank God constantly for this,"—So once again, as I've said, Paul is back into this note of thanksgiving. He really does get great joy from this church of the Thessalonians. He's constantly giving God thanks for the things that are happening in this church. It's a pleasure to him "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." Let's have a look at a few words there, and just try and get a little bit more meaning.

"When you received"—that word "received" kind of has in its meaning, in its literal meaning, it kind of means to take and to carry. "When you received"—it's kind of like they took it on board. He's kind of saying, "It became a part of you. You received it, you took it. You accepted it. It became a part of your mental complex. "When you received the word of God, which you heard." They heard it. Where did they hear it? "from us."

Notice here, therefore, something important and worth noting. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy—that's who the letter is from, back at chapter 1 verse 1: Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Paul was the apostle. Can only an apostle speak the word of God? Well, I would put it this way, only an apostle could write the word of God. The inspired word of God came to us through the apostles, or involving their oversight.

The association I've mentioned before of Luke and Mark was an association with Paul and Peter. Paul and Peter, in a way you could say, had oversight of those books, those gospels. Silvanus and Timothy were also preaching the word of God, not only Paul. Paul says all of us—"You heard the word from *us*," Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.

What's the importance? Any servant of God preaching the gospel in accordance with the word of God—any servant of God preaching the gospel in accordance with that which has been revealed to us by the apostles, whom Christ sent into the world, who gave us the Scripture—that Christian, inasmuch as they preach according to the revealed word of God, is indeed bringing to a person the word of God.

As much as our preaching is accurate to the word of God, is truly reflective of the word of God, in that much, we ourselves speak the word of God. That's why many of the Puritans, for example, called preaching prophesying. They weren't saying that when a preacher was prophesying he was bringing something new that had never ever been heard before. What they

were saying when they said a preacher was prophesying was that that preacher was carefully using, explaining, and applying the written word of God.

There's a really good book on preaching. It's called "The Art of Prophesying," from a Puritan. "The Art of Prophesying." We ourselves, in preaching, when we preach according to the word of God, applying and explaining the word of God, we are, in a manner of speaking, prophesying.

So they received the word of God, which they heard from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, and it says, "you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God." They acknowledged it to be the word of God. That word "accepted," or acknowledged, is a similar idea to the words that we often find in the Old Testament, speaking of acceptable sacrifice. God found it to be an "acceptable sacrifice."

Well, the Thessalonians found God's word to be acceptable, something that was suited, something that came from God. We could say they approved of it, but I don't like to say that, because it kind of sounds as though they themselves were the judge of the word of God. They were not the judge of the word of God. It's the work and the power of the Holy Spirit that made them accept and acknowledge that this the word of God. They accepted it, Paul then says, "for what it really is, the word of God." For what it really is, the word of God.

Notice then, as we finish out verse 13: "which is at work in you believers." Which is at work. The word of God actually works. The word of God actually has impact. The word of God actually does something. There are people in the world who know a lot of the word of God. There are plenty of academics and scholars who know more Scripture than I know, or anyone else here; and yet they're not saved. The word's not working in them, obviously. But then, they have not received the Holy Spirit. They have not had the preaching that was empowered by the Holy Spirit that came to them with full conviction, with full assurance—the word that works.

My friends, a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is also filled with the word of God, also has the right attitude to the word of God, and that word of God works in their lives, changing thoughts, changing deeds, changing the things that they do, convicting us of sin, causing us to be repentant. There ought to be things that we do because we find them in the word. There ought to be things that we don't do because we find that the word tells us not to do them. This ought to be our regular Christian experience. The word of God ought to be at work in us.

"It's a work," notice Paul says, "in believers." As I said, there are those who do not believe. They know the word of God and they get no benefit from it. It works in believers. If it's not working in a person, don't count them as being a believer. Once again, this myth that Christianity can be separated from the word of God has got to be named for what it is and rejected.

Let's keep reading into verse 14.: "For you, brothers..." Now Paul goes on there. He's said that the word of God is at work in them. He now goes on to detail some of the ways in which that work is evident. "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that

are in Judea.” You became imitators, you became copiers. He means this in the most positive way. He means this in the way that they have seen something good and that they are conforming themselves to that which is good.

If we look back there to First Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 6, Paul says of them there, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction.” Well now he says that they have become imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. They’re doing the same things that other churches are doing, and Paul says this is good. These churches that have apostolic oversight are operating, or worshiping, according to the word of God. “These churches are doing well, and you, in that you imitate them, are doing well.”

What would we be looking for if we were to go on a holiday? Last year, Lesa and I went to the USA. Where did we go? We went to some churches over there. They weren’t all that different to here. I mean, obviously, American, and there some things were a little different, but we heard the word of God read, we sang the word of God, we heard the word of God preached. All of us are imitating something. We’re imitating the way that the apostles said a church should be run.

Paul said let there be reading of the Scriptures, let there be the singing of praise, let there be submission, let there be order. And it’s a good thing that Paul finds here in the Thessalonians. They’re in submission to the word of God, and so they are imitating that which is good, which is found in other churches. And notice those churches, where are they? They’re in Christ Jesus, and they’re in Judea.

Look back to chapter 1, verse 1: “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It’s a very similar idea—“these churches of God in Christ Jesus, in Judea.” What’s their identifier? They’re churches of God in Christ, and they happen to be in Judea. And you could insert anywhere you like. Are they churches of God in Australia? Are they churches of God in Christ in Asia? Are they churches of God in Christ in Europe? If they are, they are imitators of all that is good in the Scriptures. They’re following after all that is good.

He then goes on to speak more about the work of the word. Continuing on: “For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews.” They became sufferers. “You suffered the same things.” What’s he referring to? Well, let’s turn in our Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 17. We’ll start reading from verse 1. Acts chapter 17, verse 1:

“<sup>1</sup> Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ <sup>4</sup> And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. <sup>5</sup> But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. <sup>6</sup> And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting,

‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, <sup>7</sup> and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’”

What’s Paul saying? He’s saying that the very fact that they suffered these things and were not discouraged by them but continued in the imitation of those other churches, the very fact that they suffered these things from their own countrymen indicates that the word of God is at work in them. Now let’s bring that forward to our present day and age, and let’s apply it out.

It is becoming more and more difficult and painful to be a Christian in the public arena today in Australia. It is becoming very much more the fact that we are expected to basically keep our mouths shut outside of the church doors. Say what you want in here to those who agree with you, but whatever you do, don’t say it out there to those who don’t agree with you.

Those people who are Christians—let’s hope we are counted among them, and I expect we will be—those people who are Christians are not going to stop speaking the word of God. It’s what we do. 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 8: “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from *you* in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth *everywhere*, so that we need not say *anything*.” The word of the Lord goes forth from Christians, through Christians.

It’s going to become increasingly evident in this nation as time goes by—unless God does something amazing—which Christians and which churches have received the word of God for that which it really is, the very word of God. And the evidence is going to be whether or not they continue to proclaim the word of God, even though they suffer for the proclamation; whether or not they continue to be conformed to the word of God, even though it is painful to be conformed to that word; whether or not we continue to be Christians publicly preaching the gospel to those who don’t want to hear it. It’s going to become obvious.

As legal restrictions continue, and legal restrictions move on and become persecutions, those who are not in submission to the word of God will quite happily make the compromises they need to make in order not to suffer the judgment of the world. They are already making those compromises, and they will continue to make those compromises—anything, rather than have negative publicity, a negative profile, anything rather than suffer the dislike of the world.

But those churches where the word is at work, they will suffer the same things from our own countrymen as the apostles and Jesus suffered from the Jews, and as the preachers who first went to Thessalonica suffered from the Jews. Remember, it was the Jews, as we just read in Acts, that stirred up the trouble in the city of Thessalonica. It was the Jews who were rejecting the preaching of Christ as the Messiah that caused the troubles. Turn to John chapter 15, and let’s just read from verse 18, the words of Jesus.

“<sup>18</sup> ‘If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: “A

servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

“<sup>21</sup> ‘But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.<sup>23</sup> Whoever hates me hates my Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: “They hated me without a cause.”

“<sup>26</sup> ‘But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.’” On into chapter 16: “<sup>18</sup> ‘I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.’”

Who is Jesus calling “the world”? The Jews, the leaders of the synagogues, the people who will reject the preaching of the apostles, both Jesus’ word and the word that they preach. The Jews have become the world, just a part of the world, they’re just members of the world, that great system of evil and wickedness and rebellion that’s ruled over by the prince of this world, as Scripture reveals it to us.

They have become part of the world because they rejected the words of the Messiah, and as such, they have become persecutors, and they push the Christians out of the synagogues. And so what happened to the Thessalonians is exactly that which was predicted by Jesus in the gospel of John.

Back into First Thessalonians, chapter 2, “as they did from the Jews,” the thought now continues into verse 15. Paul now brings an indictment against the Jews. These are the sins which stand against the Jews.

I’ve chosen five points out of the text, and I’m not saying that’s definitive, but these are obvious. Verse 15: (1) They killed the Lord Jesus (2) and the prophets. They killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, (3) “and drove us out.” (4) They displeased God; and (5) They oppose all mankind. These are Paul’s five indictments against the Jews. These are five sins that he considers to be against the Jews as a nation.

Remember, in Paul’s theology, as we read this and we think, “Hang on. Paul was a Jew. Why is he saying these things about the Jews,” etc., etc. In Paul’s theology, who is now the true nation of Israel? Who are now the true people of Abraham? Who are now the true people of God? In Paul’s theology it’s very clear. The true people of God are the people who share the saving faith of Abraham, who trust in the promises of God.

As far as Paul is concerned, it doesn’t matter where they’re found or what race or nation they come from, from ethnicity they come from. If they have faith in Christ, they are counted as the

nation of God, they are counted as being “the true Israel.” He actually uses that phrase—“the true circumcision.” The true Israel of God are all who have put their faith in Christ. So remember, as far as Paul is concerned, the Jews who have not put their faith in Christ are no longer of the promised race. They are no longer the people of the promise.

Point one, Paul says they killed the Lord Jesus. Let’s look at a couple of other passages of Scripture just to make sure that what Paul is saying is consistent with what we find in all the word. This one I want you to look at, Luke chapter 24, and this is on the road to Emmaus. Luke chapter 24, we’re going to look at verse 20.

What did the two people on the road to Emmaus say, one of them named Cleopas? “And how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.” Who were they blaming? Their own people—our chief priests and rulers. Luke chapter 24, verse 20, “Our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.” The Jews, as Paul says, therefore killed the Lord Jesus.

Point two, they killed the prophets. Matthew chapter 23, reading verses 29 to 31, the words of Jesus: “<sup>29</sup> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ <sup>31</sup> Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.”

Now understand the idiom. When Jesus is saying they are the sons of those who murdered the prophets, He’s saying they are among those who murdered the prophets. The sons of the Devil are the servants of the Devil. The sons of God are the servants of God. The son of a carpenter is a carpenter. “You are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. You are therefore counted guilty as being among those who murdered the prophets.” That’s what that’s saying.

Point three, “They drove us out.” We’ve already looked at that reference, Acts chapter 17, verse 5. We won’t turn to that one again.

Point four, “They displeased God.” The first reference I’ll point you to, which we already looked at, was in John chapter 16, verse 2. Jesus says, “They think they please God by casting you out of the synagogues.” But Paul says they displeased God.

I want you to go to Romans chapter 8, and we’ll just look at one verse there. Romans chapter 8, verse 8. Paul says, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. They cannot do that which is right. So if Paul says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God, and then he says the Jews displease God, what’s he saying of them? He’s saying that they are in the flesh. They have not received the Holy Spirit, they have not received the word of God.

Finally, Paul says “They oppose all mankind.” This is the fifth thing he accuses them of. They oppose all mankind. What does he mean by that? Well, on into verse 16, he makes it plain.

They hinder us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved. Their opposition to all mankind, the fact that they are against all mankind, is proven by the fact that they don't want all mankind to hear the saving message.

Who are the enemies of all humanity? All those who oppose the preaching of the gospel. That's what Scripture's saying. All those who oppose the preaching of the gospel are the enemies of all humanity, wherever they may be found, whatever they might call themselves—whatever religion they may have, whatever state they might belong to, whatever laws they may have, whatever ideology they may support. They oppose all mankind by hindering the preaching of the gospel.

Many people are very troubled by this. Verse 15 is very much a strong accusation against the Jews. And especially in our modern age, you can't disagree with someone these days without being accused of something. You can't tell someone that you think they're wrong, or that they're on a dangerous path these days without being called a name: You're a fundamentalist, you're a bigot, you're a hater, you're whatever. You hate me.

Paul doesn't hate the Jews. How do we know he doesn't hate the Jews? Well if your Bibles are still open to the book of Romans, turn to chapter 9, verse 1: "I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. <sup>6</sup> But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.'"

Paul loves the Jews, even as he knows that they are sinners who hate the gospel and are opposed to all mankind. He loves them. He's not lying. He's saying, "Look, the Holy Spirit bears witness to this. My conscience is clean as I tell you this. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. I would rather be accursed than see them die in their sins." He loves his enemies. He loves his enemies.

I'll be honest—a moment of honesty—what would be the greatest temptation that I struggle with at this moment? It would be anger and hatred against the enemies of the gospel that are in our world today. Honestly, I could get so steamed about the things that people in our government are doing. I can get so steamed about the fact that they're filling, or that they are favoring in our immigration scheme, Muslims.

Why are they doing that, by the way? It's obvious why they're doing it. Because Muslims are not Christians. Socialist ideology. And it's the socialists who are having the sway of things at the moment. I just make this point aside, because I've been asked why is it that I seem to be banging against socialism. They're the public enemy at this moment, all right? They're the open Christian enemy at this moment. They're the enemy outside our gate. If it was someone else, I'd

be shooting at someone else. At this moment, they are the ones that have set themselves for the destruction of the church and for the destruction of all that is good in our society; therefore, they're the ones that we have to deal with. They're the first in line.

Why is it that the socialists are so desperate to make our immigration policy into this nation favor Muslims and flood the nation with Muslims? The answer is simple: Because Muslims are not Christians. And part of their ideology is that they want to break the hold that Christianity has once had over Australia.

Go right back into serious socialist and Marxist ideology, and one thing they'll tell you is that you have to break down the family unit, that traditional father-mother, male-female family unit that raises children. If you want to control a nation, you have to indoctrinate children, and it's far easier to indoctrinate children who don't come from strong Christian families.

It's very easy for me to surrender to hatred and anger towards those people. I'm sure it's easy for some of you here. They're the enemies of the gospel. They oppose the preaching of the gospel. They oppose all mankind. They hate all that is good, they love all that is evil. It's a fact. That's what they are doing. Those are the laws that they are passing all over the world.

They want to hinder the preaching of the gospel. Looking there at the start of verse 16 of our passage in First Thessalonians chapter 2, they want to hinder the preaching of the gospel. And though they are the enemies of the gospel, and though they are wicked people who hate what is good and love what is evil, my friends, we're actually commanded to love our enemies. We're commanded to love our enemies. We're commanded not to hate our enemies. We're commanded to love them.

Let them hate us. We don't submit to them, we don't bend the knee to them, we don't bend the knee to their gods. We don't have to agree with them, we don't have to say they're right. God doesn't require any of those things from us, but He does require of us that we love them, and that at every opportunity, preach the gospel to them—at our own cost, if that be the case.

Remember the working of the word of God. One of the evidences of it that Paul spoke of in verse 14 was that you suffer—you suffer because the word is at work in you. We have to be prepared to preach the gospel to our enemies. We have to be prepared, if it were possible, to preach the gospel to people like Stalin and Mohammed and Karl Marx, three of the most wicked men that ever walked this earth.

We have to preach the gospel to their disciples. And their disciples walked this earth, and their disciples are rebellious and evil, and their disciples want to destroy all that's good, and we as Christians have to be prepared to preach the gospel to them.

Remember, they're doing exactly what the Jews did in the church age, or in the age of the apostles. They're doing exactly what the Jews did in that age, and what was the answer of the

apostle? “I could wish myself accursed and cut off for their sake.” That’s a challenge. That’s a challenge. There’s a real challenge to me. Is it a challenge to you?

We have to love our enemies. We have to love them enough to tell them the truth. We have to love them enough to accept them into our fellowships, should they repent and accept that truth. We have to be prepared to preach the gospel to them, and it is not for us to seek to enact the judgments of God.

Where does it tell us that Paul, knowing that the Jews were under the judgment of God, organize the Jews to be slaughtered? That’s what he did to Christians before he was a Christian. It’s not what he did to Jews once he became a Christian. Where does it tell us that Paul refused to preach to the Jews? Now at the end of the book of Acts, Paul in disgust says to the Roman Jews, “You won’t receive the word of God. I’ll be preaching it to the Gentiles.” But he had to preach the gospel to the Jews, and some of them had repented, and those Jews would’ve been accepted into the church.

This world is filled with enemies of the gospel, and the church has a commandment to love its enemies. And the way we love our enemies is through faithful gospel obedience, and faithful gospel preaching. And they oppose all mankind, and they are those who destroy the world, and God has said He will destroy them, and He will destroy them at the right time. That’s in our text here as we get now down into verse 16. So let’s keep working.

We’ve already mentioned this: “<sup>16</sup>By hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.” That is what made the Jews the enemies of all mankind. Let’s look at the last part of verse 16: “So as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!” So as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last. What’s Paul saying? He’s basically saying that when they have sinned to the uttermost, the judgment of God has fallen upon them. He’s basically saying that there was a line that they had to cross. This is actually a scriptural idea.

Listen, or turn with me if you want, to Genesis chapter 15. God’s speaking to Abram, telling Abram of his offspring and what will be the nature of God’s dealing with His offspring. We’ll start reading at verse 13:

“<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup>But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup>As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup>And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.’”

What’s God saying? God’s saying, “I’ve got a judgment for the Amorites. A judgment is going to fall upon the Amorites.” Now if we were to go into the detail of their idolatry, we would see

that it was something similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. There's a judgment to fall on the Amorites, but note that it is not yet complete. It hasn't come yet. The time has not come yet.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's exactly the same phrase that Paul uses in First Thessalonians. The measure of their judgment has not been filled up yet. Now what does Paul say here, going back to First Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 16? "So as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!" The Jews are drawing down the judgment of God upon themselves. Even as Paul denounces them as enemies of the gospel and he preaches the gospel to them and they oppose all mankind, they are drawing down the judgment of God. The judgment of God has fallen upon them. He says, "But wrath has come upon them at last."

Many of the commentators feel that Paul is probably referring to certain events that happened in Jewish history. There was a Passover riot around 40 A.D., maybe a little before or after that, and apparently thirty thousand Jewish men were killed by the Romans at that riot. It appears that Paul is interpreting these things as being an indication of the wrath of God falling upon them.

But notice what Paul's saying. And in our regular readings that we took this morning in First Samuel, what did David say concerning Saul? His foot will slip. In due time, his foot will slip. He'll go down to battle. God will take him in His time. And David acted in faithfulness to King Saul. David warned King Saul, "You know, Saul, you could've been killed here. If I were your enemy, I actually could have taken your life. But I'm not your enemy, and here's the evidence." Saul counted David to be his enemy. David did not count Saul as an enemy. David did what was right by King Saul.

That's God's commandment to us. People count us as the enemy. And those people are indeed enemies of the gospel and enemies of all humanity, and they oppose the preaching of the gospel. They hate that which is good. But it's God who brings judgment. It's God who decides what their time is, and when the judgment of God falls upon them. They're filling up the measure of their sins. Wrath will come upon them at last. The time will come. Hand it over to God. Let God be the one who takes vengeance.

Paul is also repeating the thought that Jesus expresses. We've looked there before, but look again at Matthew chapter 23. Jesus accuses the Jews of being those who have killed the prophets. Reading on in Matthew 23, verse 31, Jesus speaking: "<sup>31</sup> Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers." "Fill up, then." Be filled with the judgment that's due to your father. "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers." Stay in the gospel of Matthew, and turn over to chapter 27, and just note the word of the Jews. Matthew chapter 27, verse 25. Jesus is about to be crucified, and what do the Jews yell? "And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" His blood be on us and our children.

It's funny how the words of people in Scripture in the end always count against them. I wonder if Esau really thought he was selling his inheritance when he traded it in for a pot of food. I

often wonder if he was really aware of what he was doing, or consciously aware of what it was that he was doing. It counted against him. It definitely counted against him. But I wonder if he just thought, “Oh, look, Jacob’s a liar anyway. I’m going to tell Jacob a lie. Yeah, I’ll trade you my inheritance for a pot of food.” He counted his inheritance as being worth nothing anyway. “I’ll trade the inheritance for a pot of food. It’s not as though Dad heard me say it.” God heard him say it, and his words were counted against him.

God heard what the Jews said, and their words are being counted against them. And that’s what Paul speaks of here in First Thessalonians chapter 2. They hinder “us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!”

So let’s just make some application. Turn to the book of James and look at chapter 1. James chapter 1, and let’s read verses 22 to 25. James chapter 1, verse 22:

“<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

Be doers of the word. And then he uses another phrase, the law of liberty—“the perfect law, the law of liberty.” He’s referring to the word of God. “But be doers of the word.” If you’ve received the word, you must be a doer of the word. Do as you are commanded. Do as Paul commands here in First Thessalonians: Preach the gospel. Preach it to your enemies. Preach it to your friends. Preach it to one and all.

Live in imitation of the churches of God in Christ. That would mean live apart from sin. Be repentant. Do not be deliberately sinful. Remember Paul has also said that the Thessalonians turned aside from idols. They cast aside false and presumptive worship. They were worshipers of the true and living God.

Let’s just look at one other passage. Philippians, in chapter 3, verse 3: “For we are the circumcision.” What’s he saying? “We are the nation of God, we are the covenant people.” “We are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” We are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

My friends, we’re not going to be the circumcision if we are not the people who are born of the word of God, who have received the word of God for that which it truly is, the word of God, who are obedient to the word of God, but who do not have the word of God at work in our hearts. It’s incumbent upon us then, obviously, if we are to be those who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, to be students of the word of God. Study the word of God, be obedient to

the word of God, have your heart humble before the word of God. Be prepared to be convicted of and by the word of God.

My friends, just remember concerning those Jews who were persecuting Paul, and those Gentiles who were persecuting the church in Thessalonica. They all thought they were righteous, and they all thought they were doing good, and they all thought that they were doing what's right. It's easy for Christians to get into a hypocritical frame of mind, where we assume that the things we are doing are right, and we assume that everything we say must be right. Every thought has to be taken captive by the word of God. The only things that are right are the things that God commands, not every thought that crosses our head.

We're not inspired prophets in an Old Testament sense. We're not receptacles of the word of God. What we are is we are to be channels for the word of God. The word of God is to pass through us—to affect us, to influence us, to change us—to others, influencing, affecting, and changing them. That's the way the Scripture works, empowered by the Holy Spirit. And when that is the case, then God is worshiped truly. We worship by the Spirit of God, and we glory in Christ Jesus, and we put no confidence in the flesh. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do ask that you would help us to approach your word with true reverence and holy fear. Help us, Father, to always remember that your word is the very word of God, that you have spoken, and that we, your people, must hear the things that you have said to us.

Father in heaven, help us to have our every thought taken captive to the word of God. Help us, Father, to be obedient to your will and as expressed in your word, the very word of God. May we be a people of your word who preach the gospel of grace according to your word, that we indeed would be proclaimed throughout the world as a light in a dark place. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.