

RECEIVING THE WORD OF GOD AS THE WORD OF GOD

For the past 2 weeks, we have been looking at **attitudes** that some of the Scripture writers had toward the Word of God.

Job—who as near as we can tell lived **after the flood** but before the time of Moses—esteemed the words of God’s mouth more than his **necessary food**. It was the **spiritual food** he needed for his soul—and he treasured it more than he treasured **physical food** for his body.

David—known as “the sweet psalmist of Israel” and “a man after God’s own heart”—delighted in and loved the **commandments** of God. **Psalm 119:47** “And I will **delight myself in thy commandments**, which I have **loved**.” What is a **commandment**? Is it just a **good idea**? Is it a **mere suggestion**?

No; it’s a command—**an order**—from God!

So how could David say he loved being “bossed around” by God; that he loved God “telling him what to do?”

For those of you with a **military background**, think back to your days of Basic Training. Very few of us—if any—**actually enjoyed** being told when to **get up**...and what to **wear**...and what to **do**...and when to **eat**... and when to **shower**...and when to **sleep**—and having **no time whatsoever** to do what **we wanted** to do!

Who in their right mind would actually **love** that?

No one—at least not at first! You **do what you’re told** to avoid the consequences of **not doing** what you are told! Awh...but when the lightbulb clicked...and when you **began to believe** that their goal was to train you “to survive and win on the battlefield,” you began to look at commands in a whole different light!

In a way, that is what happened to David—and I believe what God wants to have happen **to us**!

--God wants us to understand and believe that He is **our Creator**—and **has the right** to tell us what to do!

--God wants us to understand and believe that He is the **Judge of all the earth** and that we will stand before Him some day!

--But God also wants us to understand and believe that He is a **loving and forgiving God** that will receive us as we are **if we trust in what Jesus did** for us on the cross—and not on what we can do for ourselves!

--And when we believe those things, our response should be to **love Him** in return!

I John 4:19 “We love Him, **because He first loved us**.” What will **our love** for God look like?

I John 5:3 “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.”

So what is **your attitude** toward the Word of God?

Do you have the attitude that **Job did**—that he treasured it more than food?

Do you have the attitude that **David did**—that he loved it more than gold?

I’ve said this before and will continue to say it—God doesn’t put these things in the Bible just for us to **gather information**. I believe He has the attitudes of Job and David in His word for us to **measure our** attitudes by!

What I want to do this morning is move away from evaluating our **attitudes toward** the Word of God to evaluating our **beliefs about** the Word of God. In other words, we are moving away from **how you feel** about this Book to **what you believe** about this Book.

Please take your Bibles and turn to I Thessalonians 2 and follow along as I read vs 4-13. Before we dig into the passage, I want to give you a little **BACKGROUND** about this church.

We are not going to take the time to turn there, but Acts 17 gives us a lot of the history of how this church **started** and **why Paul wrote** these two letters to the church. The missionary team of Paul, Timothy, and Silas spent at least 3 weeks there and Paul started off by preaching in the synagogues as was his custom.

Initially there was a **good response** to the gospel, but some jealous Jews stirred up a mob against the team—so much so that they had to flee to Berea by night!

While preaching in Berea, the “traveling mob” from Thessalonica came to Berea and Paul had to leave town again, this time ending up in Athens.

--In 2:17-18, we see that Paul desperately wanted to go back to see them, but Satan was hindering them.

--In 3:1-2, we see the team sending Timothy back to Thessalonica to “establish them and comfort them”

--Now 3:6. This letter, then, is in response to what Timothy shared with Paul about how the new believers at the church in Thessalonica were doing.

What I want to do now is zero in on verse 13. Let’s consider first...

1. The rejoicing of spiritual leaders

Vs 13 “For this cause also thank **we** God without ceasing...”

Who is doing the thanking? Who is the “we” mentioned in this verse?

--We know from the very first vs in the letter that it is from “Paul, Silvanus” (Silas), and “Timotheus” (Timothy)

--They, of course, are the **missionary team** from whom they first heard the gospel—the good news that there is forgiveness of sins in Christ!

--They were their spiritual “fathers”—the ones that led them to Christ—and the church “planters”

Who are they thanking? “For this cause also thank we **God...**”

--The team was **not** thanking the Thessalonians—they were thanking **God!**

How were they thanking God?

--**Without ceasing**—meaning more than once! It was a never-ending thankfulness!

Why were they thanking **God?**

--Verse 13 “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, **when ye received...**”

Did you catch that? Paul is thankful **to God** for what the Thessalonians did!

So why would Paul render thanks **to God** for something that the **Thessalonians did?**

I believe Paul was reminding **them...and himself...and us...** that **spiritual work** is God’s work! It is not just **hearing with the ear** and understanding with the mind—it is God **bringing conviction** in the heart!

Paul told the Philippians in **Phil 1:6** “Being confident of this very thing, that **He which hath begun a good work** in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:” **God begins** the good work in us—not us!

Phil 2:13—a verse we looked at last week—“For it **God which worketh in you** both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

And let’s not forget that Jesus Himself said in **John 6:44** “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me **draw him...**”

That’s a good thing for us to remember, isn’t it? We can’t **argue or “badger”** someone into receiving Christ—God needs to work in their hearts! We need to **plant** the seed—and often times **water it**—but God is the One who “brings the increase.” And that, I believe, is why Paul was thankful **to God**—because he was seeing **God working** in their hearts!

But God works in our hearts **using His Word**, doesn’t He? And the focal point of Paul’s thanksgiving was...

2. The reception of the Word of God

Again, look at vs 13 “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God...”

A. Received what they heard **through** men—but not as **from** men

Notice again the phrase “when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us...”

Imagine what it would have been like to be living in the city of Thessalonica when Paul, Silas, and Timothy came to town. It was the year AD 50—roughly 20 years after Jesus was crucified. There was no New Testament—it hadn’t been written yet—and historians suggest that the people of Thessalonica worshipped upwards of 20 false gods!

And then these 3 men come to town, enter the Jewish synagogue, and on three sabbaths reasoned with them out of the Scriptures—meaning the OT. Their message? **Acts 17:3** “...that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

Jews that regularly went to the synagogues would be familiar with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Paul expanded on the OT teaching and “connected the dots” for them. The suffering servant had come—and His name was Jesus! The results? **Acts 17:4** “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”

Some of the **Jews** believed—and a great multitude of **Greeks** (non-Jews) did, too!

What did they believe? They believed that by putting their faith and trust in the crucified and risen Christ, they had forgiveness of sins! But in order to believe those things, they had to believe that what they were **hearing through these men** were not the **opinions of the men** themselves—they were God’s words!

Think of the faith that would take! Men expanding on the teachings of the OT—and claiming what **they were saying** was the Word of God!

--They **heard it with their ears**—but couldn’t **look at it** in a Book with their eyes like we can!

--And even though the OT **was written**, it’s not like there were copies of it readily available!

What about us? In one sense, it is **very different** for us. **I cannot** stand in this pulpit and say, “**I have new information...new news...new revelation directly from God** that has never, ever been revealed!” If I start preaching that way, you better run me out of the church—and warn people not to listen to me because I’m trying to start a cult!

On the other hand, we are **like the Thessalonians** in that we have God’s Word **through men**.

--God **used men** to write this book—not angels!

--**Men**—not God—translated this book from the writings of the original authors!

So we—like the Thessalonians—**need faith** to believe that what we are holding in our laps is the Word of God—even though it came **through** men!

How did the Thessalonians receive the word of God? They heard it **through** men—but did not consider it being **from men**. Instead, they... B. Received the Word of God as the Word of God

Vs 13 “...because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard from us, ye received it not as the word of men, **but as it is in truth, the word of God...**”

Let’s start with the phrase “but as it is in truth.” Here are some other translations that might help us better understand the full weight of what is being said.

--“but as it **actually is**” (NIV); “but even as **truly it is**” (Berean Literal Bible)

--“but as what it **really is**” (NASB); “but **as it is truly**” (Young’s Literal Translation)

God inspired Paul to add this phrase to make sure we don’t miss this extremely important, destiny-determining point: **This actually, really, truly is the Word of God!**

--**Your opinion**—what **you think** of it—doesn’t change what it is: It is in **actuality** the Word of God!

--And **public opinion**—what the **majority thinks**—doesn’t change what it is: It is **truly** the Word of God!

‘But Pastor, most Americans think it is okay to **kill live babies** that are safe inside their mother’s bodies!’

To which I reply, ‘Who cares what **people think**—what does **God say!**’

‘But Pastor, most Americans think it is okay for **men to marry men**—and women to marry women!’

To which I reply, ‘Who cares what **people think**—what does **God say!**’

“But Pastor, most Americans think it is okay for a **woman to “identify” as a man**—and a man to “identify” as a woman!”

To which I reply—any guesses? ‘Who cares what **people think**—what does **God say!**’

It is time—**past time**, really—for us as God’s children to stand up for God and His Word and say, “**This actually, really, truly is the Word of God!**”

The Thessalonians did that—and it **changed their lives!** We see that in the last part of vs 13 “...which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” God’s Word **effectively** worked—it **performed its work** in them.

I’m calling that... **3. The results of God’s Word in believers**

Let’s consider first... A. What it did in the Thessalonians believers

What did the **Word of God do** in these new believers? There are **several changes** these believers made mentioned in these 2 letters; we are going to look at the 3 found at the end of chapter 1. Look at I Thess 1:9.

The first thing we see is: **1) They turned to God from idols**

I mentioned earlier that historians discovered upwards of 20 idols that had been worshipped in this city. The **names** of them...and **how** they were worshipped...and **why** they were worshipped isn’t overly important or God would have included it in His Word. What is important is that they **turned from them**.

The **2nd result** of God’s Word in their life, also in vs 9, is... **2) They served the living and true God** They didn’t just leave off following dead and false “gods”—they started serving the living and the true God! The **3rd result** of how God’s Word worked in their lives is found in vs 10: **3) To wait for His Son from heaven!**

Lastly, let’s consider... B. What the Word of God should do in us

What should God’s Word do in our lives? What work should it perform? **The same things**, right?

First, it should... 1) Move us to turn from idols to God

Does God want **us to turn from idols** to Him? He certainly does!

--Is there a **problem with idolatry** in our country? There certainly is!

--Can **God’s children** struggle with idols? Yes they can! If not, why did God have the Apostle John end the book of I John with these words: “Little children, **keep yourselves from idols**. Amen.”

Idols are **not just statues** in yards, though, are they? Idols are an **inward affection in the heart** for something—or someone—other than God. The most common idol in our country—IMO, anyway—and the most dominant religion in our land—is the **worship of self!** It wears all kinds of “costumes,” so to speak, but regardless of how you dress it up, underneath is a love for self!

God’s Word won’t just move us to turn from idols.

It will also ... **2) Move us to serve Him—the living & true God!**

--Is God **alive**? He is, isn’t He! --Is God **All-Knowing**? He is, isn’t He!

Does the All-knowing God, **know you**, your strengths & weaknesses & what makes you tick? Yes, He does!

Does the All-knowing God know what God has planned for our church and what it needs? Yes, He does!

Now for the hard question: How long has it been **since you asked** the living, All-knowing God, what He would like you to do? How long has it been? Have you **ever** done that?

‘But Pastor, I’m not comfortable doing this or that—that’s not my gift!’ To which I reply, “The living, All-knowing God knows your gifts and talents—and what He wants you to do! Start asking Him!”

What happens when we receive the Word of God as the Word of God? What kind of changes will it make in our lives? **First**, we will stop serving self. **Second**, we will start serving God.

Third, God’s Word will... **3) Move us to look for the return of Jesus!** We will “wait for His Son from heaven”—just like the Thessalonians did! What does it mean to “wait for His Son from heaven?” There’s a lot of things wrapped up in that, isn’t there?

--If we are waiting for Jesus’ return, we believe He could return at any moment!

--If we believe Jesus could return at any moment, we should not be doing that which would **displease Him—or embarrass us!** I John 2:28 “And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”

--And if we believe that after Jesus returns, He will **reward us according** to what we did for Him on earth, we will be seeking to serve **Him now!**

What about you? God through His Word wants to turn you away from the empty, non-satisfying idol of self and to serve Him—the living and true God. The new believers of Thessalonica did that. Why won't you?

And God through His Word wants you to live like you believe He could return at any moment. The new believers of Thessalonica did that. Why won't you?

How do you **receive** the Word of God when you hear it? What is your belief about it? Are you a BINO—A Believer in Name Only? If you believe the Word of God is truly the Word of God, shouldn't you be seeking to know what it says—and do what it says?

So what does God want you to do with what you heard this morning?

Pretty simple, in my mind.

1. First, He wants you to believe these words are His words. We need to start with that.

2. Second, He wants you to do what He is telling you to do!

--If you are not born again...if you are not forgiven...if you are not a child of God, He wants you to believe you are lost and hell-bound and need to come to Him for forgiveness.

--If you are born again, He wants you to live like you are a new person. He wants you to turn from your old life and serve Him.

Easy to understand—but not always easy to do. And yet that is what He wants—and deserves.

You can choose not to do that—you can choose to keep saying “No” to Him—but you cannot choose the consequences that come with saying “No” to God...