

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: Responding to God's Word

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[0 : 00] 2 verses 13 to 16. This can be found in the Pew Bibles on page 959. Again, the text is 1 Thessalonians 2, 13 to 16 on 959 of the Pew Bible.

Please stand out of reverence for God's word. 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.

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, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out and displeased God, and opposed all mankind 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 God's wrath has come upon them at last. This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Good afternoon. It's good to be with family on this afternoon. You may miss Shirley. She has a huge assignment.

[1 : 44] She is head of volunteers for the CCDA conference this fall. And they just happen to be meeting sometimes on Sunday afternoons.

You know, not by her design, but just by default. So we miss her together on this afternoon. But we're glad to be with you. Let me pray and we'll get started in God's word.

Father, thank you so much for the joy of being a child of God, the privilege of shepherding your people.

Pray, Lord, that together our time in the word would lend itself to growth personally and the advance of your kingdom. Give ourselves to those ends, and we pray in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. One of the things that any of us can be accused of, as a matter of fact, it's one of the worst things that we can be accused of, is being self-serving.

[2 : 50] Anybody ever say that about you? Selfish. You've got your own agenda, and you are promoting your own agenda. That is even compounded if you are God's servant, and they're calling you a self-serving person.

Minister of the gospel. For a pastor to be called self-serving is quite painful. That was Paul's situation on last week.

And the text found him defending himself against accusations that he was unconcerned, self-serving, in the same class as the roving, traveling philosophers that made merchandise of those who were in their hearing.

Paul's defense, as we looked at, was based on his ministry, his proclamation of the word, but also of his life that was centered in the family of God.

I want to make an advertisement right now. I have brought my sheet, and some of you still need to sign up for your bachelor visits.

[4 : 13] So, pastor's life in the midst of the people of God. So I want to make sure that I get you on my list, and I've got your names.

And so if I interrupt your dinner, excuse me, but I want to get you on my list. But Paul's experience, and he lived his life in the midst of the people of God.

And they saw him. Likely there were some of those in the midst of the Thessalonians that Paul knew by name. And when he thought about them, it may have called up pictures of brother so-and-so, or sister so-and-so, when he thought about his ministry among them.

Paul's time there was very short. But his motives were sincere, and his investment in the lives of the people of God that he ministered to were very, very significant.

Paul had shared God's word with them, and his life with them. And there was this, probably this lub-dub of his pastoral heartbeat that, concerning this newly formed family of believers.

[5 : 39] And we sort of hear this heartbeat come through at various places within this particular book. As a matter of fact, if you will look at chapter 1, verses 2 and 3, we get an idea of Paul's heartbeat for the believers in Thessalonica.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly, listen to that, mentioning you in our prayers, remembering you before our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope, in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You hear that? He was with them. He was a shepherd for them. Their positive response to Paul's ministry was reason for the thanksgiving that we see earlier in chapter 1.

But thanksgiving continues. And we see that in our text on this afternoon. Look at chapter 2 and verse 13. And so we also thank God constantly for this.

And check this out, friends. That when you receive 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.

[7 : 13] If you will look in verse 13, we will see that God's word, on the one hand, frames the text. But if you will look in verse 16, God's wrath is at the other end.

God's word and God's wrath, 13 and then 16, frame this particular text that we're looking at on this afternoon.

The word of God and the wrath of God. The recipients of God's word come into view, as do the recipients of God's wrath, also come into view in the text.

Let me give you three headers that I hope will help you as I make my way through this particular text. Verses 13 and 14, God's word received.

Huh? Verses 15 and 16a, God's word refused. And then the last part of verse 16, God's wrath reserved.

[8 : 27] God's word received, God's word refused, and then God's wrath reserved. Huh? The shift, God, the word of God received, verses 13 and 14.

The focus shifts from the minister of the gospel in verses 1 through 12 to the recipients of the gospel. It goes from shepherd to sheep, from pastor to people.

You see that? Notice in verse 13, you received. Huh? Second person. You accepted.

Huh? You accepted God's word at work in you. Huh? You suffered. You suffered. You imitated. Again, he's talking about the people.

The shift is from our appeal and our ministry in verses 1 through 12. But he begins to focus on the people of God. But notice in verse 13, how they had responded to the word of God that was preached.

[9 : 40] Let me just read that again for you. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive 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.

The word had been received amongst them, hadn't it? Huh? It had been received with the ear or the mind because that's the idea behind the word *paralambano*.

That's there. That's the sense of the word. But also, notice the second word, the word had not only been received, it had been accepted. You accepted it.

Not only had it been received with the ear, it had been embraced with the heart. Huh? What's your response to the word of God?

Is it a both and kind of thing? The word of God that is sown, did he embrace it and hold it near and dear? The word had been welcomed and embraced, huh?

[10 : 55] Ask God's word. Paul's preaching and that of his associates was, it was not the rantings of philosophical, or the philosophical musings of men.

It was not man's opinion or human wisdom. It was not even man at his best. The perspectives of the best and brightest among them.

As we look at the history of the world in general and the history of our nation, there have been some very bright people who have walked among us.

Thomas Jefferson was one of them. First Secretary of State, second Vice President, third President of the United States. if you've ever been to the Jefferson Memorial, boy, you can just be overwhelmed.

You can spend a whole day there. And it helps you to see how amazing this man actually was.

[12 : 02] It's been said that when John Kennedy welcomed 49 Nobel Prize, Nobel Prize winners to the White House in 1962, he had this to say.

I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent and human knowledge that has ever been gathered together in the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson died alone.

Brilliant man. Principal author of one of the cornerstone documents, Declaration of Independence of our nation.

Given his stature, depth, and breadth of mind, I would imagine that when Jefferson spoke, people listened.

And his voice is still heard, isn't it? And respected today. But Jefferson and all of the brilliant and brightest minds before and after him are simply human beings.

[13 : 09] Listen to Paul's word, and you don't have to turn to it, but it comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and he speaks about his preaching, his proclamation of the word. And when I came to you, brothers, I didn't come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

And my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom, but, and we see the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 1, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

That was the nature of his preaching. The reception of God's word from God's servant considered from God's servant was, they considered those who heard it the source of the message.

God's servants were indeed the channels, but God was the source. The voice was that of the preacher, but the source of the message was God.

The message had God's signature on it. It's the nature of the word of God.

[14 : 27] And friends, that has implications of, number one, how we hear it, but number two, how we respond to it. James encourages us, doesn't he?

And don't simply be hearers of the word. Be both hearers and doers of the word. The word was at work in the lives of the believers. Huh? When God's words are sown in the hearts, made clean by God's spirit, the result is like seed planted on a good ground.

There will be results. We were at Shirley's Garden yesterday on Woodlawn, and as you look at that garden, it's somewhat bare, but once the seed gets in the ground, the temperature is right, there will be fruit.

There will be food on our table. There were some big zucchinis from that garden on last year, from which we made that zucchini bread then. There will be fruit, and when God's word gets in our lives, in our hearts, it shows up in our lives.

The dynamic is seen, is in when the sower sows in the ground, and guess what? When the good seed hits the good ground, some 30, some 60, some 100 fold.

[15 : 56] Friends, there will be fruit. The word that was preached at Thessalonica had been received as God's word with all of the tended respect and the accompanying results.

But also notice in verse 14 what we see. For you, brothers, became imitators believers of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.

For you suffered the same things from your countrymen as they did from the Jews. Look at what's being said. Ready? Acceptance of God's word had implications for them.

It meant identification with God's people, but it also meant opposition from God's enemies. enemies. The believers in Thessalonica were not alone.

They had brothers who had likewise received the word of God and there was fruit in their lives, but there was also opposition in their lives. They had joined a brotherhood of people who had similar kinds of commitments and similar kinds of experiences of opposition in that day.

[17 : 11] They received God's word. They provided the example and that is the church in Judea had provided the example and the church in Thessalonica had followed them in the reception of God's word and the opposition of God's enemies.

So therefore, Paul applauds and gives thanks to God because the people in Thessalonica had received God's word. God's word.

What was the confession of the Thessalonians regarding the word preached and taught by Paul? It was God's word. Their response would be comparable to what happened when Robert just read scripture and what did Robert say at the end?

This is what? The word of the Lord. And what did you say? That's just another way of saying amen. Lutheran minister John Pless really helps us measurably and saying just what this kind of exchange between the reader and the people just really what is going on if we really take it to heart and not just are doing something by rote just doing it because it's just what we do.

Listen to what he has to say. This is the word of the Lord, says the pastor at the conclusion of each reading from scripture. The congregation receives the gift of the Lord's words in thanksgiving as it responds, thanks be to God.

[18 : 55] With this simple exchange between pastor and people, the scripture is confessed for what it is, the very word of God. And it is acknowledged as the bearer of the Lord's gifts of spirit and life to be embraced with thanksgiving.

And notice what he says, in an age such as ours where many church bodies no longer affirm the total trustworthiness and authority of the scriptures, the liturgy confesses the scriptures to be the word of the Lord.

Central to the service of the word is the reading of the holy scriptures and the preaching that is governed by these scriptures. The place of the reading of the scriptures in the liturgy is reflected of the high view of the Bible's inspiration and authority.

In the liturgy, scriptures are honored as the word of God. The word who became flesh is to be our savior, does not disdain words. As he came to us in the lowliness of our flesh, so he comes to us in human words, the words given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Through these God breathed words, God himself is at work to make us wise for salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

[20 : 18] Just a little more because this is so good. The scriptures are not to make us to be better Bible trivia players or even to give us principles for living or moral instruction, but to give us Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and raised the life for our justification.

The scriptures are the very word of God, not only as rule and norm, but also the words of the spirit, words of truth and life that reveal to us Jesus and create living faith in him.

This is the word of the Lord. We affirm that too, don't we? In our values as a church, the centrality of God's word.

We believe that the Bible is God's words. God's words are very different than our words. God creates, redeems, judges, and saves by his all-powerful word. And whenever God's word is written and proclaimed, God's voice is heard.

Do you believe that? how do you respond to that? Verses 13 and 14, the word of God received.

[21 : 30] Verses 15 and 16, the word of God refused. And notice what we have here.

There is a very clear contrast with what we see in verses 13 and 14 and what we see in verses 15 and 16.

Listen as I read. Speaking about the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind 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 God's wrath has come upon them. At last. the word of God refused.

Clear contrast. Here's the deal. New believers in Christ probably a matter of months in the faith and they were eating the word of God up.

[22 : 36] They had received it as God's word. But particularly you've got as described in Jews here those who were resistant to God's word.

Now this is the same group ethnic group through whom the very scriptures had come. This was the one that God had made himself known to them for all of their history.

But notice their refusal of God's word. Now what you have here is not Paul's anti-Semitic kind of rant.

That's not what he's doing. But it's an indictment of those who have refused God's word. That's the bigger umbrella. These and others have refused God's word.

But it was particularly egregious for this particular people because of God's history and work unique work in and among them down through the centuries.

[23 : 40] Jewish resistance to Christ and the gospel had fit a pattern seen not just when Christ came but it was seen even in the Old Testament.

Listen to Stephen's words as he spoke to the council in Acts chapter 7. You stiff-necked people uncircumcised in heart and ears you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did so do you.

Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute and they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one whom you have now betrayed and murdered.

What's he saying? There has been a history of resistance and a refusal to hear God's word amongst them. Look what follows.

The verses verse 15 reads like a rap sheet. Notice the things that they were guilty of murder. they killed Jesus and the prophets.

[24 : 41] The very ones to whom Christ had come were guilty of killing him. Parables of Jesus spoke of that particular pattern. The preaching of the apostles charged the Jewish leaders with the murder of Jesus.

Acts 2, Acts 3, Acts 4. They were unfriendly to God's son. They were unfriendly to God's servant of the past. That was their history. Persecution.

They've been persecutors of Paul and Thessalonica. They displeased God. That within itself is an indictment, isn't it? They opposed mankind. Their resistance to God and his agenda was ultimately anti-mankind.

They hindered Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles. They got in the way of the gospel. And they were filling up the measure of their sins. Those who had been recipients of God's word had reached the tipping point of God's anger.

God's word refused. But look at the last part of verse 16. God's wrath was reserved.

[25 : 53] It was reserved for those who had refused his word. what is meant by the wrath of God.

That's his anger. It's based on his holiness. That kind of concept, that idea, is not a popular one. We try to relegate that particular aspect of God's nature.

Oftentimes it's relegated to the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. And then the New Testament God is a God of love. No. It is a biblical concept that we can see in both Testaments.

What are the consequences of the resistance to God's word, their opposition to God's word, their refusal of God's word through God's Son and his servants? It was like they were having debits to their particular accounts.

It was like the Lord had in mercy and he had been sending them down through the years, past due notices, past due notices, they hadn't responded in the way that they should have.

[27 : 05] Isn't that what the Lord often does through his word? He has reminders, gives reminders to you and me. As far as where we're missing the mark, the things that we need to take care of, the things that we need to do diligence regarding.

It was like what we have in 2 Chronicles chapter 36 verses 15 and 16. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of God rose against his people until there was no remedy.

the institutions that hold the notes for cars and homes, they send those past due notices until such time that things get beyond repair.

They reach the tipping point and the cars reclaim, the home is repossessed, so forth and so on.

[28 : 19] God in his mercy sends his word again and again and he has a way of knocking and knocking and knocking on our hearts that we should respond.

Notice the verse, God's wrath has come upon them at last. God's wrath had arrived at the threshold of fulfillment and that's the idea there.

Just as the kingdom of God has attended blessedness in the present and also future dimension, so the wrath of God.

The full expression of God's wrath will be an eschatological end time kind of expression when Christ comes. But yet, as Paul tells us in Romans, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven even now.

And in the text, upon whom is it that the wrath of God rests, it is those who have refused his word, those who have rejected God's word.

[29 : 25] And while God's wrath rests and will rest on those who resist his word, you and I also know that God's wrath has rested on his son.

He has borne the very wrath of God. We sing about it, don't we? We sing about it in songs like in Christ alone, and like the song that we're going to sing a little bit later, but let's, in Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God and helpless babe, this gift of love and righteousness scorned by the ones he came to save, till on that cross as Jesus died, what?

The wrath of God was satisfied for every sin on him was laid here in the death of Christ I live, huh?

Those who refused and rejected God's word are delivered to the wrath of God. Those who hear and receive God's word are delivered from the wrath of God.

Do we not see that in chapter 1 verse 10? And to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from what?

[30 : 44] The wrath to come. There's a different destiny for those who have received God's word. According to 1 Thessalonians 5 and 9, God has not destined us believers for wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's wrath is reserved for those who refuse His word. Whoever believes in the son has eternal life. Huh? Whoever does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him.

How do you respond to a message like this? You and I must approach scripture and its preaching as God's word with all the honor and the respect and obedience that it demands.

hear it, study it, apply it, obey it, use it for equipping and training as Paul mentions in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 17.

This is the word of God and it needs our humble respect. It needs our intellectual engagement.

[32 : 07] Marcos was telling us in class, needs our emotional engagement, needs the engagement of our very lives, that our lives would be molded and shape, our minds would be renewed by it.

God's word received, God's word refused, God's wrath reserved.

Huh? James speaks about this, therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive. There's the word accept, the same word that we saw in verse 13, decami, accept it, accept it with the heart.

How? With meekness, the implanted word which is able to save your souls. That's how we should respond to God's word. If you're here on this afternoon and you find that yourself, that you have refused the very words of God, posture of repentance is in order.

So what am I saying? Those who receive God's word can escape God's wrath. Those who refuse God's word are destined for God's wrath.

[33 : 27] Let me pray. Dear Lord, thank you for your word, and may we find ourselves Thessalonian-like.

Lord, the initial report as we read Acts 17 is that those in Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica and that they searched the scriptures daily to see whether those things are so.

But yet, we see here that there was indeed a reception of your word. There were changed lives. There was a receipt of your word, and because of the reception of your word, there was a deliverance from the wrath of God to come.

May we find ourselves Thessalonian-like even in this congregation as we humble ourselves before your word. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen. It's time to come to the table. Huh? And may we do so on this afternoon.