

The Essential Receiving of the Word of God

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[0 : 0 0] Well let's turn now to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, to 1st Thessalonians, and chapter 2, and you'll find that on page 1049. We'll read at verse 10, just to pick up the thread, Paul speaking about his own ministry among the Thessalonians, and he's appealing to them as well as to God as to how they behaved themselves. They were being falsely accused, you remember. You, he says, you are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe, as you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. For this reason, we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. I want us to think about this in terms of receiving the word of God as essential to spiritual life. Receiving the word of God as essential to spiritual life.

Now, we know very well ourselves that there are those who follow the word of men, and they believe what they say, often without question. We've a pretty clear idea, I think, that with the influence of Darwinianism, the bulk of people assume that Darwinianism is the way to understand the whole system that we're in, evolving from the primitive to the sophisticated, and so on. But there are others too. We have been thinking not so long ago about Dawkins and his influence, and Attenborough and his influence too. And people are looking for explanations as to how things came into being, and how they're progressing, and where they're going. And they listen very readily to the words of men. This is true about philosophers as well, of course, as if the philosophers have the whole story in this or that way about human experience. But we mustn't forget that it's true too, that sometimes people listen to ministers as if everything they say is absolutely true. It's certainly the case. And we know from experience that it's not always and essentially consistently the case. We sometimes understand a thing with the light we have, and we say, my understanding of it is this. Sometimes people don't do that when they're preaching, and they make you think that everything they say is absolutely right. But we are obliged to check what is said by the Bible, to check it by the Scriptures.

We are obliged to do that. And when we were reading in the book of Acts, we deliberately read on in Acts 17, because the difference, or the significant difference, between the Berean Jews and the Thessalonian Jews, is that the Bereans searched the Scriptures with a readiness of mind to find out whether these things were so. Now, it wasn't all bad news in Thessalonica, of course, because Paul himself testifies about the Thessalonians who believed that they knew the difference between the human and the divine. They could detect what was the doctrine of God and what wasn't. They received the doctrine of God gladly. You see what Paul says there?

He says, you received the word of God which you heard from us. Notice that, from us. But, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

[5 : 3 7] Therefore, what I'm saying is, there was a check on what was said, and it was confirmed from the word itself. This is the message God wants us to believe, to receive. And from a preacher's point of view, the gospel, when it is received, it is welcomed and rested on as a word from God.

The preacher has a great delight in this. What else can it be? But he is delighted that people recognize this is a word from God.

People recognizing this is the word of God and they come to truly receive God's message and rest on that message.

And I just want to go over this verse to remind you that receiving the word of God is essential to spiritual life.

That was true in the city of Thessalonica where Paul labored among these Jews and the Greeks who had come in to the synagogue and were listening to the word expounded.

[7 : 00] And therefore, the first thing I want us to consider is quite simply the Thessalonians received the word preached. And I want to dig this two ways.

I want us to notice that there was an external reception of it. By that we mean they took it into their minds.

They took in what was spoken or read. And in that sense they received it. They received it into their understanding.

They thought about it. We're living in a day when there are so many ways of imparting knowledge. And teachers among us will know that in some ways things are changing too much, too quickly and folk don't settle.

But there are many ways that knowledge is communicated. not just reading and not just sitting in the pew.

[8 : 09] There are many ways whereby we can in that sense hear the word of God. But the important thing is to notice that we are to listen to it.

We're to think about it. That's why from the outset the Bible tells us Paul tells us in Romans chapter 10 which is based on Isaiah.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God and how shall they hear without a preacher and how shall they preach except they are sent.

God has chosen principally to bless the preaching of his word by those whom he appoints and he even has he even stoops down to tell us he pleased him by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

Not that the gospel is foolishness but that it is viewed as foolishness by the natural man. He thinks it's foolish foolishness but God has chosen by what man regards as foolish to actually save people to give them spiritual life.

[9 : 33] But you see the word comes into the mind. It has to be received. It's received in terms of propositions requiring a response.

If you go back to the book of Acts and chapter 2 at that great Pentecostal outpouring after Jesus went up into heaven and the crowd listened to Peter and they were carried by his reasoning from the scriptures and in verse 37 of chapter 2 they were so convicted by what they heard they cried out men and brothers what must we do?

What shall we do? But if you look closely at that passage you will see that of all the thousands who listened to Peter when he preached that sermon not all of them received the word properly.

They didn't respond to it as they should have. And we're told that many did not believe the word.

We read as I said already in Acts 17 and verse 11 about the Bereans who were actually contrasted with the Thessalonians.

[11 : 07] they were more noble. They had a humbler attitude and they received the word with a readiness of mind and they were the better for doing that.

Now of course Paul emphasizes there was this contrast between the Bereans and the Thessalonians. But we bless God that many in Thessalonica who heard the word believed the report.

But the point we're making here in using the Bereans is to emphasize to us the need to be ready to think about what the message is and how it refers to us and how it requires a personal response. response. But as much as there is an external response, it comes into our mind, there must be an internal response. We must receive it into our hearts.

If I go back to Acts 17 for a moment and verse 3 we're told that as a result of Paul's preaching to the Thessalonians, some of the Jews believed, as did a multitude of the Greeks, the proselytes who had come into the synagogue, who were revolted by the gross impurity and immorality of the pagan religion of the day, and many of those who had come in who were Greeks, many of them a great multitude believed, and a lot of prominent women of the city.

[13 : 05] Now, clearly, the emphasis here is that there was an internal, an at-heart response to the word.

And those of you who have trained minds will know that our minds benefit from training, the help with help to process things, we are able to reflect all the more.

And therefore it's important to notice that it's not enough for us to process the information. We must welcome it into, not only our heads, but our hearts.

We must receive the report, in the sense that we welcome it in to our very heart. Because the danger is, you see, that we recognize the biblicalness of the message.

We can't fault it. We can say, this is it. We can say, it's reasonable, and leave it there.

[14 : 26] And not go beyond that. And simply become so acquainted with it, that when somebody does come and preach something that's not squaring with the Bible knowledge we have and know, we flag up a problem.

we can suss it out and say, that's not right. Like, John used to talk about the people who sniff out sound doctrine, and sound doctrine, but who are not believers.

And there's a danger there for us, and we must be on the alert that it's not enough to receive it into our heads and recognize it as biblical or unbiblical.

it's not enough for us to recognize its reasonableness. The Israelites, you see, knew perfectly well what Moses was telling them.

But we're told in the letter to the Hebrews in chapter 4 and verse 2 that they didn't receive the word. What he says is, it tells us, if you like, he answers a question, why was there no spiritual benefit to the people, what was wrong?

[15 : 48] And the answer is, it was not welcomed into their hearts. It didn't meet with a believing response in those who heard it.

There was no recognition of their own sin and need of God. There was no embracing of the promises in Jesus. The gospel, he says, was preached to us as well as to them, but the word preached did not profit them.

Not meeting with a believing response in the heart, an internal welcoming response. And it's important for us, you see, each of us to answer the question for ourselves, have I welcomed the gospel message, the good news in Jesus, into my heart?

Because the short answer is, if we have welcomed the good news in Jesus, we welcome Jesus in. That's what happens, we welcome him in.

It's as if we open our heart to a friend and not a foe. to welcome the gospel message, the good news in Jesus, into our hearts, not just our heads, but into our hearts, is to welcome the Christ of the message.

[17 : 21] Let's pursue that for a moment in the second point. The Thessalonians received God's message. Paul puts it two ways, he puts it negatively and then positively.

See, he says, when you received the word of God which you heard, you welcomed it not as the word of men. So they received God's message not as the word of men.

There's an interesting and helpful insight into this, not as the word of men. reason. Because you see, when we put God's message to us at the bar of human reason, we'll find fault with it.

We'll find fault with it. Whenever man places God's word at the bar of human reason, he will reject it.

God's word. That is true of those in the Christian church who have not welcomed the Christ of the message into their hearts.

[18 : 38] It's true of the false religionist. It's true of the philosopher or the secularist. when you take God's word to the bar of human reason, you will reject it.

You will find fault with it. And no matter how persuasive the propositions are of the Christian message, the natural mind resists and refuses the word of God.

It takes issue, I would say, reading something. I don't think I read, because I mention Dawkins quite often. I read a lot of them, but I do read.

I read recently that one of the things that offends a man greatly is the problem of evil in this world and the problem of suffering in relation to a sovereign God of love.

That's not new. People down through the ages have found that difficult. And the Lord's people find that difficult. If we're thinking at all, it's hard for us to grasp some of the things that have happened on the face of the earth in relation to God who is just and holy and loving and true.

[20 : 00] We can't pretend. But there's a world of difference between admitting it's hard to understand and simply refusing to believe in God and embrace the message of good news in Jesus and the Jesus of the message.

The two things are totally different. And what I'm saying here is we've got to be careful that we welcome the message as from God and not from man.

because if we simply take it as the word of man or if we assess the word of God through our own reasoning simply, we will find ourselves rejecting the message of salvation.

And what we find when Paul emphasizes in the second place is that God was at work in Thessalonica calling out his own.

You only need to go back to the beginning of Thessalonians where we read this and preached on this before. He says our gospel didn't come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

[21 : 23] God was at work he said. And that's why he says positively you received it as the very word of God.

You received the message the report the thing heard and you received it as a word from God.

You remember just back a couple of verses there in verse 8 he talks about the gospel of God verse 8 and he talks about it in verse 9 again.

We preach to you the gospel of God and they received it you see as a truthful and trustworthy word from God.

They recognized it as from God. And so when Christ was sent forth to them as the one who was crucified in the room instead of his people dying the sinner's death bearing the sinner's liabilities yes his eternal woe they recognized that this was from God.

[22 : 54] And they grasped in their hearts the truth and they received that by faith. And when they heard about a risen Savior they recognized that this was God's way not only of approving what Christ did in dying but in opening up the way for sinners of mankind to become his own adopted children.

God was at work and they recognized the message was not simply the message of man but the message of God that brought light and life to them.

And that's the way it needs to be for ourselves. Whatever the preacher may be saying when he bids us to look to Jesus and come to Jesus it's about what the Lord says to our heart that we welcome.

I remember usually coming across the words in a we him I hear thy welcome voice which calls me Lord to thee for cleansing in the precious blood that flowed on Calvary.

There was recognition there was a spiritual apprehension that Jesus was bidding them to come to him in that way for cleansing. And the response you see was I am coming Lord coming now to thee wash me cleanse me in the blood apply to me the benefits of your death Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 50] And there needs to be that response. Paul is saying we welcome the word as a word from God and to spiritual life.

And if we are believing hearers of the divine word then we are willing to receive into our hearts the Christ of that word.

And we recognize that the faith we have in Christ comes by the spirit of faith himself. He works faith in us.

But our response is needed. You received it not as the word of men but as it is in truth the word of God.

They welcomed it. But the last thing we want to think about very briefly is the message they received was effective. See what he says there?

[26 : 03] Which also effectively works in you who believe. the word effective there is it's operative in you.

It operates. It is at work. And if I can just go back for a moment to the beginning of Thessalonians 1 Thessalonians Paul gives thanks to God.

Verse 2 always for you all making mention of you in our prayers. What does he say? remembering without ceasing your work of faith.

That is the works you do as the fruit of that living faith in Christ. Your labor of love. A labor that is born out of love for the Lord and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see the fruit of it was there. The fruit of that change was there. The word first of all was effective in their hearts and to salvation.

[27 : 14] They closed with the offer and received Christ. They welcomed him in. And the second thing was it was effective qualitatively in their lives.

It produced the goods. It made them different. It made them so different he says back there that you became a pattern.

Verse 7 of chapter 1. So that you became examples, a pattern to all who believe. You were exemplary.

And you see it's helpful for us to consider this point because the evidence of the great change in us is important not only to others to see but to us to know about.

The fruit that is good comes from the root that is good. And where the word of the gospel is gladly received into our hearts, the Christ of the gospel makes us fruitful in our lives.

[28 : 29] That's the logic of this. When Christ is believed on and rested on, spiritual life dwells in us because Christ dwells in us.

It's as simple as that. Where the root is, where we're rooted and grounded in Christ, when we've welcomed him in, the fruit will come from that good root, Christ in us.

The spirit of Christ works in us. And you see then, there is external evidence. Our interests are Christ centered.

It's not just about ourselves. The concentration of our thoughts and energies is Christ work. The works as we read a moment ago produced by living faith are done unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Our commitments are towards him. It's not about outshining one another or so and so, such a superb worker in the church.

[29 : 48] This is not the way to view it. It's how am I? How am I working out this faith in Christ? How am I working out that I have really received the Lord Jesus Christ seeking to bear fruit for him?

And of course, that fruit will be evident. We know that we have passed from death to life, says John, because we live our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We have a love for the Lord, for his people, and for people generally. And we live in hope daily in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're working towards something that has to do with Christ's return. You see what he says there? in verse 3 of chapter 1.

And patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father. We're living life for Christ in the hope of his coming again to receive us to himself.

[31 : 13] And therefore, we ought to be looking for fruit in our lives. He says here that if you like where the root is, the fruit will be.

This truth of God that you welcomed into your hearts works effectively Christ's work.

Christ's work and man work. And so it's important for us to ponder the truth that we've looked at together about what it is to receive the word, not simply into our heads, but into our hearts too, and that's receiving the Christ of the word.

God, because we receive it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of the living God.

We believe the good news in Jesus, and we receive the Jesus of the good news into our hearts, in whom we have the forgiveness of sins.

And you see, as we've said a moment ago, the result of that is something's going on effectively in us, and it's bearing fruit unto God.

[32 : 41] For this reason, Paul says, we thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of man, you welcomed it, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also operates in you, it operates effectively in you, who believe.

Well, may we discover in our own experience that that is truly what's going on. Amen.