

The Gospel Effects on Preachers and Hearers

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to 1st Thessalonians and to chapter 2. 1st Thessalonians chapter 2 and we're going to look at verses 7 to 9 and think about the effects of the gospel of God upon preachers and hearers.

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1st Thessalonians calling upon God to bear witness to it. 1st Thessalonians that they knew the kind of person Paul was. 2nd Thessalonians they knew the kind of people his fellow missionaries were. 2nd Thessalonians and that they were not false, hirelings, greedy, covetous or anything of the kind. And this is a continuation really of the same thing except he wants them to think about how the gospel of God not only gripped the preachers but it gripped the hearers.

[1 : 57] In this case themselves in Thessalonians. Now there's a sense in which of course Paul is defending the gospel of God.

And in a sense he's defending God too whose gospel it is. But he's also defending himself and his fellow preachers. And we're reminded in that second part that there are times when we have to defend our name.

The keeping of the commandment you shall not bear false witness has to do with the preservation of the good name of ourselves and of others.

You who know your catechism will remember that. We are obliged sometimes to apply ourselves to defend ourselves. Not endlessly of course but to set the record straight.

When it is clear that our name has been misrepresented and our character besmirched. And that's what Paul is doing here. For the sake of the gospel of God entrusted to him and for the sake of himself and his fellows as they go on with their work.

[3 : 13] The whole idea of these slanderers was entirely wrong. And we saw that Paul showed the Thessalonians by calling them to remember the quality of their lives as they came in to Thessalonica.

It stood up to any test. But he goes on here to say that, you know, in fact, we didn't stand on our dignity as apostles of Christ.

We could have insisted on a place, an entitlement. No, no, no. He said we didn't call upon the principle in the Bible that we're worthy of devil honor.

In fact, we engaged in labor. Verse 9, we'll look at it. You remember, brethren, our labor and toil.

We worked in order to do what we could to manage.

We weren't a burden to you. And what I want us to do as we move towards looking at the effects of the gospel of God upon the preachers and the hearers in Thessalonica is to ask the question first, what is it that enabled Paul and his fellow missionaries to behave like this?

[4 : 31] What is it that enabled them to care for the Thessalonians in such a loving and affectionate manner? Well, he tells us here, it's the difference that the gospel of God made to their lives.

And I want us just to spend a few minutes thinking about this turn of phrase, the gospel of God. And then to look at its effects on the preachers and the hearers.

The gospel of God. It's used in the passage we're looking at twice. It's used in verse 2 of the same chapter.

We were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God. And I suppose that it's only in a study like this you're actually called upon to focus on a turn of phrase like this.

We read it in our Bible reading and we never stop. We just hurry on. And it's good in a study like this just to pause and ponder the gospel of God.

[5 : 48] It's used in that verse 2, as we say. It's used here in this passage in verse 8b and again in verse 9b.

We wouldn't be a burden to any of you. We preach to you the gospel of God at the end of verse 9. And so, therefore, what we're looking at here is that Paul emphasizes again and again, not only that his message was the gospel of God, but in Paul's focus, sorry for making the face of a computer screen, but it's what afflicted us folks who rely on our computers for so many things.

But for Paul, God was right in the middle of the screen. All that he was doing was about God, the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Paul's whole life was about God and how he could bring people to God to know the living and true God and how they could live for that God and be with that God forever.

Paul was legitimately obsessed with this. And in fact, someone has noticed that from the beginning of this first letter of Thessalonians to verse 10 of this chapter, the word God, the divine name God, is used 25 times.

[7 : 21] And in this little study we're engaged in today, the gospel of God is used twice in three verses. That's significant.

Because you see, it stresses the importance of the message that Paul proclaimed. It is the divine message. It's not of human origin.

We didn't contrive it. Paul actually says something interesting that's relevant here, and I'll bring it in. When he's talking about those who crucified the Lord of Glory, he refers to the rulers, to Pilate and Herod and the others, the Sanhedrin, that august body of the Jewish council.

And he says, if they had known that Jesus was the Lord of Glory, they wouldn't have crucified him. That's what he argues, if they had known it.

Well, we might say, they should have known it. But you see, I mention that because Paul there, writing to the Corinthians, is basically saying that the origin of the good news in Jesus lies with God.

[8 : 42] Men, not even the intelligentsia of the world, the rulers of this world, could have thought it up. Because the rulers of the world had their hand in crucifying him, and they didn't realize, in a sense, what they were doing.

Pilate tried to wash his hands of it, but ultimately he gave the sanction. Take him and crucify him. And the important thing here is, you see, that far from being a man like the slanderers of Paul, far from being a man like they were saying he was, he was absolutely transparent in his whole way of thinking.

He was in it for God. He was about the business for God. He wasn't in business for himself. It was all about God's message of salvation, of everlasting life in Jesus, and all the wonder of that and the splendor of it.

They were trying to say his message is not unique. It's not the only message about God and his salvation that at other ways listened to us.

No, no. For Paul, God, the living and true God, was in the frame, at the center. And you see, this is something that is relevant to you and me today.

[10 : 27] There are many who claim to lead us to an experience of God, or of the power that's out there, or of that great spirit, and so on.

You've heard the jargon, the same as I am. But even within the church, the World Council of Churches some time ago, tried to, almost like it was on the crest of a wave, tried to embrace not only Christianity in its extremities, but other religions too, into one big happy family.

It can't be done in a way that pleases God. It can be done in a way that pleases man, I agree, but not God. God's revelation in Christ as the only way of salvation is not negotiable.

You can't, you can't water it down, you can't modify it in a way that pleases God. Oh, I'm not saying you can't modify it, of course.

But you modify it at your peril. I remember years ago, back in the early 90s, Archbishop Carey was not prepared at that time to stand up and stand out and say that Christ was the only one through whom men are saved.

[12 : 00] He was a bit dodgy on it because he was such a leading figure. and he felt under pressure from a world that really wanted one big happy family.

Well, we can want one big happy family. We can want the whole world to acknowledge Christ and worship Christ and know they've been redeemed by Christ.

but it must be God's way and not some hybrid way. So, you see, what we're looking at here is as relevant today as it was when the Apostle wrote this to the Thessalonians.

Men and women, too, can think up all sorts of ways to bring people together under one banner and say we're the worshippers of God.

And they can put the gospel of Jesus Christ on par with other messages. But that doesn't equal the gospel of God.

[13 : 19] and it was a wise and perceptive rabbinical scholar called Gamaliel you have it there in the gospel who said we must take care when they were trying to suppress the followers of Christ.

Do you remember? We must take care in what we do to these men lest we be found fighting against God. I often wonder we're not told actually we're told that Nicodemus Rabbi Nicodemus came to faith in the Messiah Jesus.

We're not told about Gamaliel I often wonder did Gamaliel come through? I suspect he did. That was a most perceptive thing he said.

We must take care we the establishment the Jewish establishment those who are committed to keeping Judaism going we must be very careful what we do to these men lest we be found fighting against God.

If it's not of God it will come to nothing. And Paul you see wanted the Thessalonians themselves to remember that they came Paul and his fellows came with a message that originated in God it was about him and it was from him and Paul's message of course you know he says it to the Romans I am not ashamed of the gospel or of the gospel of Christ why?

[15 : 05] for it is the power of God and to salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also the Gentiles you see it was the gospel of God it was about the triune God and his way for us to know him and enjoy him here and forever more and he was not going to negotiate that away the God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life Paul said writing to Titus it's not by works of righteousness which we have done he saved us but in his mercy he saved us with the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the

Holy Spirit Titus 3 4-7 it's all about God and Paul you see was at pains to emphasize that he he he wanted people to know that that that the Jesus who called himself the good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep was God it was about the gospel of God the good news of God and it's always a burden to any minister who's worth anything that he cares for the people to whom the Lord has sent him he wants them to come along with him those of you here today who are unsure of where you are in your spiritual life when I came to you six years ago my dear friends how can

I do anything but be as urgent today as I was then how can it be any different we want to for you to be able to say I believe the gospel of God I know it I know the Christ of God and I'm resting on him and to me it would give me the greatest pleasure to know that you are affirming in your hearts that you are not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God in your own heart and to salvation and in that I can identify with Paul he wants them to think like this we preached not ourselves but the gospel of God Christ Jesus the Lord and that takes us to our second point the effects of the gospel upon the preachers and the hearers and I'm going to concentrate first and mainly on the preachers it made the preachers caring that's the first thing that kind of ties in what we've just looked at the effects of the gospel of

God upon the preachers we were gentle among you see he says that there verse 7 we were gentle among you that's the first thing gentle among you now I'm not going to pass this word because this word is used in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 24 when you read about the servant of the Lord that's the preacher of the word and he says this the servant of the Lord must not strive he mustn't fight or be quarrelsome but gentle towards all men and he's got to be so gentle that in meekness he's instructing them he's trying to show them the right way if perhaps

God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth and that's a lovely word gentle among you gentleness is not an intellectual flabbiness and softness it's it's it's it's it's that kindly patient way of dealing and Paul says we were gentle among you he was gentle with them in their ignorance of of the doctrines of the gospel their inadequate views at certain points of the truth I'm going to share something with you just now about somebody and I shan't mention a name but you're wise and you'll know it it was a very fine and eminent Christian among us gone now to glory and she had a great difficulty with believing in the reality of bodily resurrection not resurrection but bodily resurrection and I remember when this happened at first it quite surprised me and so

[20 : 48] I sought little by little to help her see the wonder of this the reality of this and how it is based on the reality of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ well it took a wee bit of doing you might think fancy that but that's part of the job that's part of the spiritual pastoral ministry along the way you find things you least expect to find salvation but getting rattled and quarrelsome and calling into question whether she was converted at all would be totally wrong you help folk to see more clearly because we're in this together we want to see the gospel of

God the good news in Jesus affecting people maturing them developing them in their understanding and any wise minister knows we'll be learning more and more of the Lord all our days and throughout the endless days of eternity eternity in whatever tasks we will have in the renewed universe in the heavenly Canaan and so on we'll be learning more often and so you see I'm saying here that was Paul's whole approach we were gentle among you we wanted to help you little by little we weren't blasting you for your blunders or mocking you for your stupidity on the truth no we were seeking to bring you to see from

God's own revelation the true way of it didn't mean that he didn't see it as error or he condoned this erroneous view no he would help them to see under God's blessing and we can learn from that you see the duty of being gentle with one another when we hear something it's a bit of a clang in biblical knowledge we don't round on folk that's not the approach we were gentle encouraging and patient and with those who are young in the faith of course but those who are not so young either and maybe have a difficulty in getting a view that's a wee bit off track moved but it is a lovely way in which he operated gently in order that God himself would show them that what he was saying was true the second thing is it it made them the gospel of God made them like nursing mothers just as a nurse nursing mother cherishing her own children what a lovely beautiful warm easy to understand turn of phrase as a nursing mother any good nursing mother knows perfectly well some of you can go back in your own mind's eye and you know that a good nursing mother is watchful over her little baby whatever affects the baby affects the mother she's fully involved in the well-being of her child Paul saying we were like nursing mothers we were involved in your progress and development we were so concerned about your spiritual health that we would have imparted our very souls our own personalities to you see what he says there we would have imparted not only the gospel but also verse 8b but also our own lives because you become dear to us that's what we're about and that was a level of commitment so affectionately longing for you just like a nursing mother we would have imparted ourselves and you see this is the effect the gospel had on these preachers and so it should be and we need to recognize it it makes the preacher's job a lot easier if folk realize that's what they're about but it made them labor continually they toiled and strained at their work even to the point of exhaustion verse 9 you remember brethren our labor and toil for you these are strong words in the original laboring to exhaustion that we might not be a burden to any of you don't know that people realize just how ministers feel about these things if the minister thought for a moment that people and I've heard this well he's got a free house doesn't pay accounts glad you're smiling John because I appreciate that if they thought that's the way folks saw them they'd be out they couldn't bear that I certainly couldn't you do what you can because the gospel of God is central and the people to whom you can matter to you listen we were gentle among you as a nursing man so affectionately longing for you we would have imparted every scrap of our inner being that you would be coming along with us in the way and Paul could say that that's the difference the gospel of God made upon him and his fellows to spend themselves and be spent in the work of

[28 : 04] God among the people and lastly in that same point how it affected the hearers and we're told right from the beginning of this letter how it affected them we saw in our earlier studies that Paul's labors and his fellow missionaries had been blessed wonderfully from you he says sounded out the word of the Lord so that Macedonia and Achaia heard listen what happened in Thessalonica is fantastic they've really believed in the Lord Jesus and it's affecting us too verses 7 and 8 of chapter 1 it was like they were a sounding board and the message of how the gospel affected these folk was going out in every place what a transformation and therefore it's important as we conclude this because we miss to pray for one another to pray for our ministers to pray for people around this that the effects of the gospel of

God will be seen in their lives what a difference it makes and I'm saying that fully cognizant of the sorry state we're in in the free church not to mention the church in Scotland generally or the church in the United Kingdom in general because it's sorry enough to but I'm conscious that there's fighting and infighting and suspicions and what is that to do with the gospel of God we've lost our way we

need to listen to what the God of the gospel is saying to us in the word and get a grip so that instead of the regions around us here oh they're at it again what's next there's a sweet fragrance of Christ in all the corners of our villages and our towns and cities about the difference the healthy wholesome difference knowing

Jesus makes let's pray all the more for ourselves and for our fellow professors of Christianity that the difference will be seen oh my friends let's not be a hindrance to the work of God in Scotland today by neglecting prayer for the ministers and the elders and the deacons and the members and ourselves let's get back to the basics of apostolic Christianity that there will be a sweet sweet aroma all around to the glory of the God whose gospel it is a gospel he has entrusted to us to live and to share amen