

Receiving the Word of God

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[0 : 00] Amen. Let's turn again to the chapter we read in 1 Thessalonians 2.

I'm reading again at verse 13. It's on page 1188. 1 Thessalonians 2 and at verse 13. 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.

I suppose a question we always have to ask ourselves is this. What do you do with the Word of God? It's a question we need to ask ourselves tonight because we're singing the Word, we're reading the Word, and now we're preaching the Word.

The question is, what are we going to do with this Word? Well, we're told very clearly here that the church in Thessalonica, when they got that Word, they received it and they accepted it.

And this Word, in the receiving and accepting of it, changed their lives. It worked in them. That's what we're told, that they accepted this Word, not as the Word of men, but as the Word of God.

[1 : 31] Now, in this chapter, Paul, as is always, is having to defend himself. And he often felt sorry for the Apostle Paul because everywhere he went, he was being misunderstood.

And he was always having to defend himself against people who were accusing him and accusing him falsely. The accusations were all wrong.

And people's judgments and accusations so often are like that. The Lord Jesus Christ himself was always being falsely accused. And here is Paul, and again he was being falsely accused.

So he defends himself. In the first six verses, really, he's defending himself, what we would say, by a series of negatives. And then from verse 7 to verse 12, again he's defending himself, but it's more by way of positives.

And he's reminding the church that we see that, for instance, in verse 7, that we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother, taking care of her own children.

[2 : 39] And Paul here is showing that they couldn't have done more, that their ministry in Thessalonica was a ministry of love. And they were using the example of our mother.

Now, one of the things that we know about our mother is that our mother pours out her love upon her children. And it is real love.

Because when love operates, love doesn't keep account of what it's doing. Love isn't seeking for return. Love isn't saying, well, I've done this.

Now, because I did this, I now expect in return. Love doesn't operate like that. And all of you in here who are mothers and have brought up children know exactly what that is.

You give yourself totally, unreservedly. You would die for your child willingly. And that's what love is. And the Apostle Paul is saying, that is how I worked and ministered among you.

[3 : 50] Whatever it took, I would do in order that you might prosper and in order that you might grow. And I suppose we could almost take the analogy a little further.

Because I suppose a mother, and we see here that it talks about a nursing mother. And I would imagine that we're talking here about little children because we were gentle among you.

I would imagine here it's babies. And I would well imagine that a mother who is feeding her baby has to watch, I suppose, to a certain extent what they eat because that will be reflected within the milk.

And I think that is true spiritually as well. That the Apostle would have to, and I think it is true not just for the Apostle, it is true for all who are involved in gospel work.

Indeed, I would say it is true for every single Christian. That in order that we would be of help, in order that we would be able to minister to others, we need ourselves to feed properly.

[5 : 00] Because if we are going to be of any use to other people, it is important that we feed, that we eat properly. In other words, in order to be able to work for the Lord, it is imperative that the Word of God becomes our diet.

We cannot teach people, we cannot be used properly by the Lord unless we are eating right. And I think the Apostle brings this out. But not only does he say that we were among you like nursing mothers, but also like fathers. Verse 11, For you know how like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you. And again, here he is using this example of the father who would be there to teach and to encourage and to support. And again, that is such a vital part of any ministry or of any work. And it is a vital part of the Christian in order that we might indeed seek to build up and to encourage. Encouragement is so important.

[6 : 13] And we live in a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Christian. And we know that because the whole atmosphere of the land is one which is attacking the Christian faith more and more.

There is a rampant atheism which is gaining ground. And the Christian faith is being pushed aside and marginalized more and more.

And it is imperative for the Christian to be encouraging one another. It's absolutely essential. And I'm sure when you look back, if you're here as a Christian tonight, you will look back upon those who encouraged you in the faith.

and particularly when you were a young Christian, those who maybe took time to speak to you, to put their arm around you in a spiritual sense, to encourage you and to help you.

You'll never forget that. These people were worth their weight and gold. The Barnabases. And so we've got to be careful. We've got to remember these. And this is how the Apostle Paul was.

[7 : 27] We often think of the Apostle as being, and he was in many ways a rugged kind of man. And there was a fearlessness and a boldness about him. And he would take anybody on.

And yet we see at the other side of him was a gentleness. Like a gentle mother. He was an encourager. Yes, Paul was a single-minded believer.

He was passionate. And he was, he just, it was sometimes he had tunnel vision. But here's the other side. He was a man who cared deeply.

And the cause of Christ was always first and foremost in his heart. But we see here that Paul's great burden was that he would walk worthy.

That's what he's saying, that he would walk worthy. We encourage that you would walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And he now goes on to talk about the word of God because he says that this church, and this was a church that thrilled the apostle.

[8 : 37] It was very active. It was a very vibrant church in many ways. It had its own faults and problems, but that's not what we're looking at tonight, as every church does. But what we see here is that Paul was constantly thanking God.

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 a word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God.

Do you tonight have this appreciation for the word of God? God, is this word special to you? It ought to be. You know, sometimes because we've grown up with it, we've become so familiar to it that we treat it lightly.

We forget sometimes that this is the word of the living God. This word cost. To have this word, let us remember what it cost.

It cost many of those who wrote the word, who were inspired by God, the God-breathed word, but many of them, it cost them dear in the writing of this.

[9 : 49] We've got to remember what it cost Jesus Christ, who is the word personified. It cost him his life, cost him his everything. So when we pick up this Bible, we've got to remember that this is God's great gift and that it cost heaven its most prized possession.

So it's no little thing to have the word of God. The word of God is powerful. It is radical. It is changing. It changes people's lives. It alters people.

It changes from within and affects people in their outward behavior. It's not just an outward change. This is the beauty of it. It works within.

We're told elsewhere that the word of God is like a sword. That pushes right in. It goes right in. It turns. It twists. It divides asunder. So I hope tonight that you appreciate this word.

But the question that we have to ask ourselves at this particular moment is how do we receive this word? because the church in Thessalonica had a, there was a, there were two ways that they could receive it.

[11 : 04] They could receive it either as the word of man or they could receive it as the word of God. And there are many people and it seems that their attitude to this word is that it's the word of man.

Now, many people will come and they will come to church and they will sit under the word. I'm not saying that that is how you are tonight. But I know that that's how it can be. And it will be the case, I'm sure, in many churches where people will come in and they will sit under the word. And they will set themselves up as judge of that word. They will judge the preacher. It's almost like some contest to see whether this preacher, is he good?

Is he this? They'll almost give a preacher marks out of ten. They'll wonder, is he sound? Is he able to expound this word?

[12 : 15] Does he get into it? Does he deal with it? And there are many people and they will sit in judgment void of any mercy and sitting with a critical ear upon God's word.

Do you know this? That's one of the most solemn things a person can do. Because this is the word of God. It's a living word. And people are there sitting in judgment upon that word.

And they're saying to themselves, well, I don't think this is very good. Now, again, I know that a preacher can begin to give his opinions about things and can go off at tangents about things and that, we're not talking about that, but when we're being faithful to the word and opening what the word is saying and seeking to apply that word, then we are not at liberty to sit in judgment upon that word.

Remember, one day, we're all going to have to give an account, preacher and listener alike. What did we do with God's word? What did we do?

Was I faithful to it? Did I come to it and sort of hold back and say, oh, no, no. I'm going to water this down. I'm afraid I'll offend people by what I'm saying.

[13 : 35] God's not going to allow me that liberty. Remember, we have to give an account for everything that we have done in the body, whether good or bad. That's a solemn, sobering thought, isn't it?

Everything. Some people think it's only some things we have to give an account for. No, it's everything. God says. That's what the word says. And we've got to live upon this word.

Either we accept it or reject it. We cannot be selective. We can't take parts of God's word and say, well, I believe that, but I don't like that. We don't have that option.

This is God's word. And so, we've got to ask ourselves, how do we react to God's word?

Do we ignore the message? I hope there's nobody in here tonight who is ignoring the message, who's building up barriers against it, who is in their mind resisting it.

[14 : 34] Are you here tonight and you're putting out the arguments as to why you will remain a non-Christian? Christian in the outward sense of accepting and believing that the Bible is true.

true? You know, I don't believe really that there's anybody in here tonight who is saying, I don't believe the Bible is true. I don't think you'd be here. and I thank the Lord that you are here and that you believe that.

But please, don't build up barriers and put, make this resistance and say, no, Lord, I don't want you to be king of my life.

I don't want you to be Lord tonight. Oh, down, further down the line it's all right, but not just now. what if the Lord were to call you out of time and to eternity tonight?

You see, we're not in charge. We are not, we don't know when the Lord may call for us. Many people are called out of this world in full health and strength up until the moment they're called out.

[15 : 46] We don't know. I might be called out tonight. I don't know. The thing is, are we ready to meet our Lord? That's one of the verses in the Bible.

Prepare to meet your God. And we prepare to meet our God by accepting God's gift, Jesus Christ. See, when we come to church, in a sense, we come to God's surgery. And that's one of the things that the Lord does when we come under the word. Sometimes he takes out his scalpel and he begins to, he begins to cut and to probe.

And you know, sometimes it's painful and it's uncomfortable, but it's necessary. And every time we come to God's house, we ought to be coming in and saying, Lord, open my heart.

Give me to understand. Help me to see. Because you know, one of the, one of the things is that God keeps changing. we can have different attitudes.

[16:52] We can have, we can make up our mind about this and that and the next thing and then we come into God's house and God says to us, and when, when we're reading the word, the word speaks to us.

The Holy Spirit is applying the truth in a way where we're able to say, ah, now I see. and it, our minds are changed.

Our attitudes are changed to things, to opinions that we've had. And that's why it's a living word. And we've always got to be ready for this, to be challenged so that we will be open to, open to the truth all the time.

And I hope that when you come to God's house, that that's how you come. Ready for God to speak to your heart through his truth, so that you will hear what God the Lord will speak.

You see, Jesus tells us that how we listen or how we hear is very, very important. The first thing Jesus said to us is, see that you do hear. And then he says, take heed what you hear.

[18:02] That's important. Because everything that we hear and everything that we see creates its own impact and its own impression in our lives.

Maybe we don't realize that. But everything that's going in through the ear gate and through the eye gate affects us. You may say to yourself, I don't think that's true.

Well, just take, for instance, one thing. Supposing you're going out to church tonight and somebody makes a passing comment to you about somebody. and supposing it's a negative comment about somebody.

Very likely, your attitude or the impression that you had of that person may change slightly. And you say to yourself, ah, never knew that.

And you begin to look at that person in a slightly different way. You see, what we hear, it affects us. And even if it's rubbish that you've been told, it still affects you.

[19:14] So that's why Jesus says, take heed what you hear. And you can put that in a thousand and one different ways. Because everything that we hear, and we hear so many things, our minds are bombarded all the time.

We're hearing, hearing, hearing stuff all the time. All of these things are affecting us for good or for bad.

It's not neutral. It's either for good or bad. Same with what we, what our eyes feed upon. What, what is it? So Jesus is saying, take heed what you hear.

And he also says, take heed how you hear. In other words, like for instance, when we come in here tonight, how are you hearing?

Are you listening? You see, it's the line of the song somewhere, people hearing without listening. And that's so true. We can hear, we can hear a voice, we can make out some of the words, but we're not listening.

[20:27] somebody says, what was being said? You say, poor, I'm not really very sure. So Jesus says, make sure, watch how you hear.

Make sure that you really listen to what is being said. my friends, the Lord Jesus is speaking to us tonight.

And you know, when we come under this word, it is so important that we take it as we, as this church did, as the word of God. The first word that we find in the Bible when, when we open the Bible in Genesis and it begins right at the very beginning there, it says, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

And then in verse 3 it tells us the first words that God spoke and God said, let there be light. The first words recorded by our God were the words, let there be light.

And these words have been echoed down throughout the generations and many of you in here tonight know the reality of that.

[21:41] Yes, these words were spoken into the void, spoken in at the dawn of creation, but the greatest creation of all is the new creation in your soul.

And God spoke these words, brought light and life into your, into your heart. And I hope and I pray tonight if there's anybody in here who is still in spiritual darkness, you're still groping about, there might be a little light, it might be a, your word might be a world of shadows, where you're seeing a little but you're not seeing enough.

You're hearing a little but you're not hearing enough. And you're saying to yourself, if only I could see a little more clearly. I need to see the cross, I need to see Christ.

I'm hearing all these things but I'm, it's like being in a maze. It's a world of shadows or maybe for some it's a world of darkness. Well you say to the Lord tonight, as you're under the word, Lord may this word come in reality and power into my life and the Lord say to me, speak into my heart tonight, bring light, let there be light in my life.

Will you ask him that? Will you? right now say, Lord, let there be light in my heart tonight.

[23 : 12] And that's what happened in the church in Thessalonica. The Lord brought that light in because, and they were able to receive it as God's word. And you know, when it is God's word it becomes, it becomes everything to us.

This word becomes our map and our compass in life. So often we're not sure just what to do. Every, you know, so often we face situations and circumstances, difficulties, issues, and we're saying, right Lord, what should I do?

Sometimes it takes a wee bit of time, but if we trust the Lord, he will show us from his word. And often you'll find it in your reading. And maybe it's a week or a ten days or a fortnight later and all of a sudden it becomes clear to you.

Ah, I say, now I know. And we've got to do it. Again, the word of God is not only it's our map and our direction, but it's our comfort.

And we need comforting in this world. It's a difficult world. Many, many wonderful blessings in this world. And if we were to look back over our life, it is filled with many wonderful things.

[24 : 35] We've had many great days in this world, but we've also had difficulties and there have been clouds and there have been shadows. And for some people, there have been real hard times.

And you know that God's word in these times, it's so precious. I have heard so many people in the face of real tragedy and sorrow talking about how important God's word is to them at that particular time.

Where they have discovered in a wonderful way the reality of his promises. Where the Lord's presence promises. There are so many different promises in the word.

Because the Lord tells us, the Lord tells his people, you know, I've even engraven you in the palms of my hands. You're like the apple of my eye, the most tender part, almost, of our being.

Instinctively, we close our eyes. We don't even think about it if something comes to threaten our eyes. Something going to go right into the very center. There's straight away a reaction.

[25 : 52] Everything is built around it to give our eye protection. And the Lord is saying, you, my people, you're there like the most tender part of my eye. I'm so watching over you.

You're so precious to me. And so this word is such a tremendous word of comfort. And again there are times when we're crippled by sin, our own sin.

And we disappoint ourselves and we feel such failures. And sometimes we wonder and we say to the Lord, Lord, what's going to happen to me?

And the Lord says, your sins and your iniquities, I will remember no more. And you're given the faith to believe it. This word, no wonder the psalmist said, it's more precious than gold.

It's sweeter than honey. It's stronger than a hammer. It's sharper than a sword. This word, you're a believer tonight, would you change this word for anything?

[26 : 58] No, nothing. This word you live on and it's this word you will die on. This word will change your life, change your perspective.

I suppose one of the classic examples of that is in Psalm 73 where the psalmist is in the dumps. And life is tough for him. I don't know what all he was going through but he felt he was feeling like what is the point in following the Lord?

I'm suffering, suffering, suffering. And he's looking around at all these people who aren't following the Lord and their life is going smoothly. Everything's going well.

and he's envious of the wicked. He's at a really low ebb and he goes to God's house. And he comes to God's house and he opens God's word.

And everything changes. All of a sudden the Lord is showing to him how things really are. And he's beginning to see that he is actually the one who has everything.

[28 : 09] And those people that he was envying just a little ago, that they are actually there to be pitied. Because they are sliding as it were and they're oblivious to it.

They're sliding down a slippery slope and they're going to plummet off the edge into lostness. And he's the one with everything. And he says, Whom have I in the heavens high?

But thee, O Lord, alone, and in the earth whom I decide, besides thee there is none. There are few psalms that have so changed from despair to joy. That's what God's word does.

And I hope tonight that all of us will receive this word as the word of God. And I pray that this word will change our lives.

That's what Jesus, you know, in John chapter 17, he's asking, part of his prayer, his great prayer, is for change to take place in the lives of his people through the word.

[29 : 12] Change them, sanctify them through the truth. Thy word is truth. Tonight, today, every day, God's people are being changed by the truth.

I hope tonight that there are people in here whose lives have been changed by the truth. I hope tonight that God has taken this word, his own word, and that he has opened some hearts tonight. Let's pray. O Lord our God, we give thanks for this word, and as we sit under it, we pray that our lives will be changed for good.

We give thanks, O Lord, for thy goodness and grace towards us. thy grace which is sufficient for us. Lord, if there is anybody in here who has not come to faith in Christ, we pray that they will pray for that faith even now.

We pray, Lord, if there are those who are in darkness, that they'll pray for light, gospel light, the light of Jesus. Lord, be with us.

[30 : 31] Cleanse us from our sin. We pray to take us all home safely. Do us good to go of your sin in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. God