

## Thessalonians, Part 4: Really the Word of God

**1 Thessalonians 2:13 ESV (Pg. 574)** 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. **14** 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, **15** who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind **16** 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 wrath has come upon them at last!

I. To be a Christian means that you believe something; not just that you have intellectually assented to a set of facts, but that you have internalized those facts so much that they impact the way you think, how you act, and your priorities.

A. When I say “you’ve internalized those truths”, I mean that you don’t just agree that something is true. I can believe a number of things are factual, and yet that belief may not **necessarily** have any visible impact on my life at all.

1. For example, I may believe that saving a portion of my money each week, or eating healthy and exercising would have a beneficial effect on my future. But if I continue to max out my credit cards, or live on a steady diet of chili dogs and beer in front of the TV, then knowing everything about saving, nutrition, and exercise are of no value to me whatsoever.

2. Similarly, nowhere in the Bible do we see that it is enough to “only believe”. In scripture, belief always implies some movement of action or obedience.

a) When Jairus’ daughter was sick in Mark 5 he sought Jesus to heal her. When Jairus discovered that she had died, he despaired. In that moment Jesus told him not to be afraid and “only believe”.

b) But Jairus had **already** acted on his faith by going to Jesus and bringing him to his daughter! Had Jairus not moved toward Christ, his daughter would not have been raised, and would have stayed dead.

3. Similarly, on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter preached to the masses and they asked what they had to do to respond to God’s message, he didn’t tell them to come to the front and repeat a little prayer after him, he told them to “repent **and** be baptized...for the remission of their sins”<sup>1</sup>.

B. This is **not** to say that we are saved by works and not faith alone. We are saved only by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible is clear about that. But as we’ve said time and time again, faith, if it is genuine, will always be accompanied by actions of obedience that demonstrate that Christ has taken his rightful place as Lord and Master over every single area of your life.

1. This was what John the Baptist preached when he said to bring forth the fruits (evidence) of repentance. He told the tax collectors and soldiers who came to be baptized how repentance would look in their daily, 9-5 lives.<sup>2</sup>

2. **James 3:14 ESV** What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

II. So if this is true, we need to know what it is that we are to believe, and how we are to act in accordance with the belief we have embraced. Where do we find the answers

to those questions? For the true believer, there is no other source of truth apart from the written Word of God, the Bible. What the Bible says trumps all public or personal opinion, competing interpretations and private revelations, whereby people validate their conclusions by simply saying, “God told me...”.

A. This is a good thing. Opinions and private revelations are too subjective. But God has given us scripture so that we would have concrete and objective truth.

1. Our confidence in what God has said in the Bible comes from the fact that scripture is more than a book; it is of divine-origin; coming directly from God.

a) Paul told Timothy that all scripture was literally “God-breathed” (inspired).

b) **2 Peter 1:20 ESV** knowing this *first of all*, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but *men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*.

2. Because it comes directly from God, the Bible is completely sufficient. As Isaiah said, the Word always accomplishes the purpose for which God sends it, succeeding in everything he intends<sup>3</sup>.

a) If this were not true, the Word would not be sufficient. The third verse of scripture teaches us that whatever God says is accomplished. **Genesis 1:3 ESV** And God *said*, “Let there be light,” and *there was light*.

b) The Bible is sufficient, relaying to us everything God wants us to know about himself and how we can know him. It is, because of this, infallible.

**Psalms 19:7a ESV** The law (Word) of the Lord is *perfect*... If the Word of God is polluted with any errors, it would be risky to trust any of it.

B. The Thessalonians received the Word of the God as authentic, sufficient and infallible when Paul came and preached the gospel to them. The Jews in that city were familiar with the Old Testament, but Paul pointed to Jesus, and made it clear that he was always the central focus of those ancient texts.

1. The pagans didn't even have the benefit of the Old Testament passages. But they listened to Paul, receiving the gospel by faith as satisfying and true.

2. So whether Jew or Gentile, Paul is rejoicing in that they received the scriptures is proof that God had chosen them for salvation. **1 Thessalonians 2:13b ESV** ...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.

C. This is important for us to consider because we are at an all-time low ebb in the western church in respect for the Bible as God's genuine, revealed Word.

1. A 2014 Pew Research Poll<sup>4</sup> found that less than four-in-ten Christians (39%) say the Bible's text is the word of God and should be taken literally. Additionally 18% of Christians view the Bible as written by men, not God.

2. 39%?!? 18%?!? If you don't take the Bible as the sufficient, infallible Word of God's self-disclosure, you can't call yourself a Christian according to any reasonable standard. Jesus constantly said the Bible was the authoritative Word of God<sup>5</sup>. The New Testament writers held the same position<sup>6</sup>.

D. When Jesus began to preach in the book of Mark, he said “repent and *believe the gospel*”<sup>7</sup>. What gospel is he talking about? The one that the whole Old

Testament was pointing to; the gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming in his ministry, which would be thoroughly explained in the gospels and the writings of the Apostles after his death and resurrection.

1. The point is that the gospel is entirely Biblical. If you dare to undermine the authority of scripture, yet claim to be a benefactor of the gospel Jesus, I can only conclude that you are completely deluded and deceived.

2. If the Bible has no authority, and is not the flawless word of the self-revealing God, then the gospel itself is powerless and we are all dead in our sins.

III. My first conclusion is this: To be a Christian is inseparably linked to a belief that God has spoken powerfully through the uncorrupted, written word of God (the Bible). My 2nd conclusion will be that such a belief will permeate our lives, progressively, affecting every part, or we can't claim to actually hold to that belief.

A. Paul says that the evidence of their belief in the uniqueness and power of God's Word was seen in the way they endured hardship. **1 Thessalonians 2:13b ESV** 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. **14** 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, **15** who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind...

1. When all hell broke loose in Thessalonica, the new believers didn't just assume that something had gone horribly wrong, or that they had made a huge mistake by embracing the message of Christ.

a) Instead, they so valued what they had heard and believed, recognizing the tremendous advantage it was to them, that they were willing to suffer whatever potential losses accompanied it.

b) **Matthew 13:44 ESV** "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

2. That is how people act when they really believe they have heard God. Why don't we see a similar response in American (or even Lubbockite) Christians? Maybe we really don't believe that God has spoken, or that this book is just one of many competing options for worldviews?

a) Here's an easy test to assess us: The Bible says to give thanks in all circumstances (good or bad)<sup>8</sup>. But do we really do that, or do we complain and groan about every disadvantage, just like the world? (I know some of you do, because I've seen your Facebook posts!)

b) But if you don't believe the scriptures, which clearly tell you that God is ultimately in charge, you literally **cannot** rejoice in everything. No one's that motivated. Life changes too fast, and is often too apparently dark.

3. But on the flip side, if you **really believed** that **Proverbs 30:5a ESV** Every word of God proves true, you couldn't **help** but rejoice in everything.

a) You'd see every provision and blessing as a sign of God's mercy, and you'd view suffering and trials as discipline, and the way he shapes you to the image of the Son, which is what you would desire above all else.

- b)Your eyes would constantly fill with tears of joy as you remembered how he has said that he would never leave you or forsake you, no matter what you're going through, and that would sustain you through anything.
- B.The church at large is in this quagmire of unbelief because we dumbed down what it means to be a Christian. We have made Christianity all about **accepting** Christ. Among other religions and worldviews, Jesus vies for our loyalty. If we believe he is beneficial, we vote for him by “letting him into our hearts”. We not only heard and believed that lie ourselves, but we've infected many subsequent generations with that same false idea of “joining” Jesus (like a kind of a club).
- 1.There is a problem with that. Mark Howell points out that “The Christian life is not about accepting Jesus; it's about following Jesus. And following Jesus requires that we submit to a whole new agenda, Thus it is impossible for anyone who claims to follow him not to be interested in what scripture teaches.”<sup>9</sup>
  - 2.And what the Bible teaches is that he is not competing with any other false god or idea. Rather, he is the Lord and Master of all creation, whom winds and waves<sup>10</sup>, angels<sup>11</sup> and demons<sup>12</sup>, sickness<sup>13</sup> and death<sup>14</sup> all obey.
- C.His demands are total, commanding us to forsake everything we have to follow him<sup>15</sup>, including our families<sup>16</sup>, our wealth<sup>17</sup> and even our own lives<sup>18</sup>. But if anyone truly hears him, he promises true family<sup>19</sup>, treasure<sup>20</sup>, rest<sup>21</sup>, and eternal life<sup>22</sup>. Genuine Christianity is so much more than just casting your vote for Jesus. This is total, sacrificial, eternal commitment to a King and a master.
- 1.If you look at the footnotes of my sermon notes today, you will see that everything that I just said about Jesus was backed up with 18 different scripture references. (You can find my notes online at northridgelife.org)
  - 2.Why is that important? Because I made my case about Jesus, not from my opinion, or someone's novel interpretation of the text, but straight from the pages of scripture. If you continue to neglect the Bible, you will never know who Jesus is, what he wants, what he has done, or what he offers.
- D.You might say that you've been in church all your life, so you know the Bible pretty good and think you don't need to search its pages that often. Perhaps you would even accuse me of being a little legalistic and religious.
- 1.But just remember that Jesus who inspired every word of the Bible, and was himself called the Word by the Apostle John, quoted Deuteronomy to the devil, saying, **Matthew 4:4 ESV** “Man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**”
  - 2.When Paul was run out of Thessalonica, he went to the neighboring town of Berea, where he went to the local synagogue and began to preach the gospel. Though the Thessalonians received the word (as we've discussed all morning long), listen to what the Bible says about the Bereans: **Acts 17:11 ESV** Now these Jews were **more noble** than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. 12** Many of them **therefore** believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

- a) They were more noble because they didn't take Paul (the Apostle!) at his word. They examined the scriptures daily. I am honored by all of you who trust me to rightly handle the word for you, but how thrilled I would be if you left here every Sunday and opened your Bibles to find out if what I was saying was lining up the God's Holy Word!
- b) It's scary to think that many preachers stand in the pulpit every Sunday and preach outright heresy, and most in the congregation never even notice! Some might even shout "amen"! How is this possible? Because no one has examined the Bible for themselves!
3. But notice also the use of the word "therefore" - "Many of them **therefore** believed" Why did they believe? Because they examined the scriptures to see if these things were so. They believed **because** they examined the Word!
- a) If you have trouble trusting God; if you feel like you are constantly wavering in your either your confidence or your faith, perhaps you're not spending enough time at the feet of Jesus in his Word.
- b) **Romans 10:16 ESV** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" **17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**
- IV. One last point. Paul ends this passage with a resounding condemnation of the Jews who have instigated the persecutions against them, but more importantly who have rejected the Word of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **1 Thessalonians 2:14b ESV** For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, **15** who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind **16** 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 wrath has come upon them at last!**
- A. Paul said that the Jews "displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved". When people reject the Word of God, they tend to become either militantly or passively hostile to it.
1. Atheists, who insist that everything we believe is a fairy tale, will fight tooth and nail to suppress any public expression of faith. But what threat is a fairy tale? Why don't they fight the Easter bunny with the same level of aggression? Could it be that the voice of eternity within them can't be totally silenced?
2. Atheists, secularists and false religionists hate the message of the gospel no matter how many "coexist" bumper stickers they plaster on their cars. And because they hate it, many will do anything to discredit it, or silence it in order to keep others from embracing it and being saved.
- B. But in doing so, they have failed to realize that they have picked a fight with God; a fight that obviously cannot be won. **Psalms 115:3 ESV** Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.
1. To resist God's decree and his plan is to surely incur his judgement. This is what Paul says has come upon the Jews. He could be referring to a number of things that occurred between the years 44AD and 49AD (a famine, a riot and massacre, or the official expulsion of all Jews from the city of Rome).

2. But I think that, though it hadn't happened yet, he is referring to the impending destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple in 70AD, along with the Jewish sacrificial system in general.

a) What they had held to so long had been made obsolete by Christ, who had pronounced final judgement on it in Matthew 23 and 24, and because they resisted him, they missed "the hour of their visitation" and sealed their fate as their Messiah ascended to his throne to reign forever.

b) **Luke 19:41 ESV** And when he drew near and saw the city (Jerusalem), he wept over it, **42** saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. **43** For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side **44** and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

C. To resist, or ignore, or to question, or mock God's Word will always result in judgement for those who do so. May it never be said that we were among those who did not value and cling to every Word of the Lord. May we believe it, confess it, embrace it, devour it, celebrate it, and most of all, obey it.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:7-14

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:11

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/14/5-facts-on-how-americans-view-the-bible-and-other-religious-texts/>

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 4:4, 5:19, 22:29; Luke 11:28, Luke 24:27, 48; John 5:39; 10:30; John 16:12-15 (where he says that the Apostles will receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit to write scriptures - the New Testament - after his ascension), John 17:17

<sup>6</sup> Acts 17:11; Romans 10:17; Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:21-22; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 3:16

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18

<sup>9</sup> *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians*; by Mark Howell; Pp. 51-52; © 2015 B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 8:27

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 26:53

<sup>12</sup> Mark 1:23-27, et al.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 4:39

<sup>14</sup> Luke 7:11-17, 8:49-56; John 11:1-44

15 Luke 11:43

16 Luke 14:26

17 Matthew 6:19-24; Matthew 8:18-24

18 Matthew 16:24-26

19 Matthew 12:48-50; Mark 10:29-30

20 Matthew 6:20; Mark 10:21

21 Matthew 11:28-30

22 John 3:16