

How the Thessalonians Received the Gospel

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 - *“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. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.*

¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. ¹⁸ Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.”

Background Notes

The apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians soon after the church was founded. So this letter was written to a new, young church. Paul would have stayed at Thessalonica longer to help establish the new believers, but he and his team had to leave suddenly because of life-threatening persecution.

This account is found in Acts 17:5-15: *“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.*

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

Paul sent Timothy back from Athens to see how the young church at Thessalonica was doing, and when Timothy rejoined the apostle Paul at Corinth, he brought good news. In spite of the persecution, the believers at Thessalonica were standing firm. So Paul wrote this letter to these young believers, commending them for their steadfast faith, giving further instructions about godly living, and answering their questions about the return of the Lord.

In fact, the return of the Lord could be considered the theme of the first epistle to the Thessalonians. The Lord's return is mentioned in every chapter of this book!

Doctrinal Points

1. The Word of God is effective in the lives of believers.

Verse 13: *"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."* What is your definition of the Bible? Is it "the words of man about God," or is it "the word of God to man"? I hope you'd say that it's ***the Word of God to man!***

Last week I spoke with a man who had a neo-orthodox view of the Bible. He believed that the Bible is not the word of God in essence, but it can ***become*** the word of God to you as you read it! In this incorrect view, the Bible is a human book and therefore it can contain error. It is not the word of God, but God can use it as a channel and speak to you through it. And thus it ***becomes*** the word of God - to you.

The Thessalonians certainly didn't have a neo-orthodox view of the Bible! And neither should we! The Thessalonians received the word of God and welcomed it - not as the word of man, but as it truly is: *"the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."* ***That's*** the correct view of the Bible!

In Matthew 4:4 the Lord Jesus said: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."* No wonder the Bible is effective in the lives of believers. It is like living seed that is effective for salvation when it is believed and received.

1 Peter 1:23 says, *"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through the word of God which lives and abides forever."* The Word of God is not only effective in salvation – it is also effective in the life of the believer. *"...which also effectively works in you who believe" (v13).* Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of souls and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

The Word of God can bring conviction. It can bring comfort. It can bring guidance. It can bring challenge in the life of the believer. The Word of God is effective in the lives of believers.

2. The work of God is hindered by “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

As you know, “the world, the flesh, and the devil” comprise the three-fold enemy of the Christian. All three unite to oppose the work of God.

- *The world.*

Verses 14-15 tell us that the world operates to hinder the work of God. Just as the world of the Jews would not receive their Messiah, but rather persecuted the prophets and then the believers in Christ, so the Gentile world persecuted the Thessalonian believers. And let me tell you – if you’re a godly believer, the world will persecute you, too.

In John 15:18 the Lord Jesus said that just as the world hated Him, it would also hate believers – His followers. 1 John 3:13 says, “*Don’t be surprised if the world hates you.*” 2 Timothy 3:12 says that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will** suffer persecution. So the work of God is hindered by the world - but the world can’t stop the work of God! That’s the good news.

- *The flesh.*

Verse 16 says that the work of God is hindered by the flesh: “*Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.*” The unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica actually became jealous and would not let the gospel be preached to the Gentiles. That’s what we read in Acts 17:5, “*But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious...*” This jealousy was the flesh at work - and the same is true today. The sinful nature of man (the flesh) is proud. It is jealous of what the gospel can do to change lives, and therefore it opposes and hinders the work of God.

- *The devil.*

Verses 17-18 say that Satan himself hinders the work of God. How did Satan hinder the apostle Paul? And how did Paul know it was Satan? We don’t know the specific event Paul had in mind here, but we could say in general that any opposition to the work of the Lord is a hindrance from Satan.

However, any hindrance from Satan can only occur under God’s permissive will. Not only that, but God can actually overrule Satan’s schemes and use the hindrance for good! God works in **everything** for the good of the believer (Romans 8:28). For example, one good result of Satan’s hindering Paul from getting back to Thessalonica was that he wrote this letter – and now we have the teachings of 1 Thessalonians as part of our Bible. The work of God is hindered by the world, the flesh, and the devil - but God overrules.

3. The reward of God is determined by our service to people.

Verses 19-20: *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”*

The Bible speaks of rewards in Heaven for faithful service for Christ. This truth is taught in 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, Revelations 2:10, and 1 Peter 5:4. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19 the “crown of rejoicing” is mentioned, and we see that this reward is **people**. Paul would have the reward of rejoicing at the coming of the Lord, and he would rejoice in Heaven forever, because the Thessalonian believers would be there!

That may not seem like much of a reward to you right now - but think it through. What a great thrill and joy in Heaven if someone were to come up to you and say, “I’m here because you shared the gospel with me!” Or “I’m here because you visited me when I was sick, and you told me about the Lord!” or even “I’m here in Heaven because you were not ashamed to bow your head and give thanks for your food at my restaurant!”

By the way - the implication here is that when we are in Heaven we will know one another, and we will remember people and events. It’s exciting to know that in Heaven we’ll find out that we were the links in the “chain of salvation” for many people! The reward of God is determined by our service to people.

Practical Application

You can take it with you!

We often say, “You can’t take it with you” when you die. But guess what? You **can** take it with you! Is that some new teaching that Dr. Dave dreamed up? No!

Of course we all know you can’t take your material goods to heaven. All your money and the “stuff” that’s so precious to you now will stay right here. But you can use your money and your material possessions to serve people, and to bring the gospel to people, and to help them grow in the faith. Remember - **people** are the only things that will be redeemed out of this world. So by using your money and your material possessions for helping people to know the Lord, you can “transfer your stuff” to Heaven in the form of redeemed people! So - you **can** take it with you!

Did you know that there’s only one thing holding back the worldwide ministry of “ECS,” the “correspondence school” of Emmaus Bible College from being more effective? That one thing is stingy Christians.

So let’s believe what the Lord said in Matthew 6:19-21, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Loosen up the hold on your purse strings and your wallet! The result will be - **you can take it with you!**