

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16 "The Servant Is Not Above His Master"

**1 Thessalonians 2:13-16** <sup>13</sup> For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. <sup>14</sup> For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, <sup>15</sup> who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, <sup>16</sup> hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

As much admiration as Paul had for the Thessalonians, and as excited as he was for their walk with God in Christ, the thing that pleased him most was that God would be glorified through their lives; that God would be recognized and adored as a result of Him working in the lives of His people.

And this is why Paul earnestly desired and encouraged the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls us into His own Kingdom and glory.

Yes, we should be found obedient, and yes we should be encouraged when we walk in His ways, but no, we should not seek any glory of our own nor should we boast in our walk with God as though we had something to boast about.

Praise God we can find our lives being conformed into His image day by day, but our becoming more like Christ is something Christ is doing in us and not that of ourselves. This does not take away our personal responsibility to obey, in fact it enhances it because we now have the Spirit of God enabling us to obey. But even in our obedience God must get the glory and we must live thankful lives that point others to Him.

This is why Paul thanks God for the way He's working in the lives of these Thessalonians.

1TH 2:13 "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you

accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

This is an amazing statement because it clearly shows how Paul fully understood his role as an apostle and as one who was called by God to declare and reveal the Creator and Savior in words given by God to Paul who then, in turn, gave to the Thessalonians.

This does not discount the fact that Paul was certainly giving them the word of God as it was already revealed in the O.T. Scriptures, but here we see that Paul was acknowledging that these people were accepting the words of Paul as the very words of God, not as the word of men, which was at work in those who believed.

This does not mean that every time Paul opened his mouth that he was speaking the very words of God. Rather, it was only as he was moved by the Holy Spirit to speak on God's behalf that those words were in fact the words of God to be delivered to men in what we know to be the written word of God at the hands of men like Paul.

Peter also recognized this which is why he acknowledges that Paul's role as an apostle involved the giving of the very words of God to men.

**2 Peter 3:15-16** just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter equates "*the rest of the Scriptures*" with the words Paul had written to the saints in all his letters, which is to say, that all the letters that Paul had written, as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance, were nothing short of God Himself communicating to the church, and by extension, to the world.

And Peter expounds on this modus operandi by God in his second letter.

**2 Peter 1:20-21** <sup>20</sup> But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

And so, whether it is Peter or Paul or John or any other of the N.T. writers, they fall into the camp of having delivered to the church,

and the world, the very words of the living God and Creator and Savior.

And so, just as Jesus could say of the Old Testament Scriptures, "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: (**Matthew 22:31**), He too says the same of the N.T. Scriptures.

**Revelation 22:18-19** <sup>18</sup> I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

"This book" is a reference to the book that John was compiling called the Revelation of Jesus Christ, but it must necessarily include every other book of the Bible since it is all the word of God that must be believed and that all points to the Savior Himself, Jesus Christ.

God is the One who has spoken and He has done it through His prophets and apostles. And therefore, we must listen and believe every word from God. Because outside of believing the very words of God as is manifest in the 66 books of the Bible, that we possess, we will not have God's work performed in us as Paul teaches in our text.

**1 Thessalonians 2:13** <sup>13</sup> For this reason we also constantly thank God that *when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.*

And what is that work? It is the work of the Holy Spirit who takes His word, as He regenerates our dead spirits, as He gives us life, as we are born by Him from above, and we now can respond to that word in the faith He gives, leading to eternal life.

Paul thanked God that His word was received as God gave these Thessalonians the ability to receive it and believe it.

This is why Paul thanked God. He thanked God that these Thessalonians received Paul's message about this Messiah, but more than that Paul thanked God that they understood that the message was literally heaven sent because they understood that it was a word from God.

And if God speaks, people should listen. They did, but they were able to listen because God gave them ears to hear. You see the word of God is active and living, but for those who choose death by rejecting God's word, the word then only becomes your judge and a witness against you.

The word must be combined with faith. There are lots of people who have heard the word of God and have even agreed with much of what it says, but have never embraced it, nor Jesus of whom it speaks, by faith, to appropriate what the word says concerning their eternal future as well as their present state with God.

Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says.... HEB 4:2 "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

The same writer in Hebrews says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." (Heb.11:1-3 )

Faith is not a blind leap in the dark any more than this creation is a figment of our imagination. Creation is real because God has made it so, and our faith can trust that He made it all by just speaking it into existence.

And just as real as is His creation, so is His salvation spoken of in His written word which finds its fulfillment in the living word, the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us as John records for us in his gospel.

That Word is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The same Word who instructs us to repent and believe, which is nothing short of exercising faith in who He is and what He's done on our behalf.

But even that faith is something God gives. Paul speaks of this in EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

And again, what Paul was so excited about is that He saw God actively at work in the lives of these people who responded to God's gift and accepted it, not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which performs its work in us who believe.

The problem with the world is that they don't believe it's the very word of God, for if they did they would run to the God who gave it and would trust in Jesus Christ who gives eternal life.

This word which we have in our possession is God's very word and if you will be so bold as to believe it and accept it for what it really is, you will not only be assured of the forgiveness of your sins along with the gift of eternal life, but you can be assured of a life according to His will today if you will simply believe that this entire book is His word.

But, if you would even think that this is something that is authored simply by men I wouldn't blame you for rejecting its message of eternal life and a life here and now in communion with God every day.

However, the fact of the matter is it's God who is the author and as the apostle Paul says in 2 Tim.3:16-17 ..... "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Don't neglect the word of God. Read it, meditate upon it, and study it often so that you "may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

For the Thessalonians, Paul could encourage them as ones who had received the word and believed the God who authored it. And for that reason they were able to follow and glorify God even under adversity as that word was working in them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

1TH 2:14-16 "For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."

The churches in Judea were birthed as a result of the persecution in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen. They were scattered from Jerusalem into Samaria and Judea. Most of these people were Jews, but now their own countrymen were persecuting them for their faith.

Paul says, just like them, you too are suffering at the hands of your countrymen who are Gentiles just like you. He draws a parallel and explains that suffering will often follow putting your faith in the one true God, Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Lord.

Not even Jesus was to escape suffering. Paul tells us in verse 15 that the Jews killed the prophets whom Jesus sent and then they killed Christ. And then Paul goes on to say that these same Jews drove us out and because of their hostility to the gospel they are not pleasing to God.

Imagine having God displeased with you. It's tough enough having friends and family being displeased with us, but God? Now before you get the idea that Paul is a Jew-hater, keep in mind that he was a Jew, and that whenever he had an opportunity he would first go to the Jew with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He loved his fellow Jew. In fact in Rom.10:1 we read .....

"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."

But, when it came to anyone, including the Jew, who came against the work of furthering the kingdom of God, Paul said it like it was. And in the case of some Jews, they not only came against the work, they actually came against Jesus Himself, encouraging Pilate to put Him to death by crucifixion.

And so, by making this comparison, Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have become imitators, without even seeking such a distinction, of the churches who were made up of Jews in Judea and who were being persecuted by the same kind of Jews who hated the Messiah, even to encourage His death.

In the case of the Thessalonians they were being persecuted by their own kind; other Gentiles. And yet in an odd sort of way Paul encourages them by explaining that God is fully aware of the sinful behavior of their adversaries. And not only aware of it, but He's actively involved in their final outcome.

Because like the rebellious Jews who hindered Paul from his work for God, the Gentiles who were rebellious against God would be judged. The last part of verse 16 says, "In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."

Sin will be paid for. In Christ, our sin is paid for by our Savior Jesus who took our penalty to the cross and gave us His

righteousness in return. But those who will not believe will receive their just reward.

**John 3:18** <sup>18</sup> "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

In our text this morning, Paul says wrath will come upon them. If not in this world certainly in the next, and it will be forever.

As Christians we are new creatures in Christ, we are more than conquerors in Him who died for us, and we belong to a Kingdom which will never fade and to a King who will never leave us or forsake us. And yet we are told that suffering is something that not even God's people will escape in this world.

Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it this way in regards to the great salvation we've been given: "Along with the privileges go the responsibilities. Paul spelled it out bluntly to the Philippians in Phil.1:29 'For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him', Suffering is a part of the Christian message. The Christian pathway was never intended to be a bed of roses or a pathway strewn with soft-petaled lilies."

Now, someone might say, "Wait a minute, we can't be telling people that becoming a Christian will mean the possibility of suffering for Christ."

We can't? God does. In fact, I think the church has done a disservice to people by not telling them what Christ expects of them. He expects undivided allegiance and loyalty. He expects obedience, but He doesn't expect us to go through any suffering without Him right beside us.

Now, don't get me wrong, I don't think it's appropriate to paint a picture of Christianity as a religion which expects us to get dumped on and to simply take abuse from people because we're to be meek and mild.

Suffering for Christ isn't something which we go out of our way to find. When the word of God tells us that we will suffer as Christians, it means that it is inevitable that the world will reject the God who sent His Son for our salvation, even as they reject us.

It means that when we take a stand for God, there will be those who will take a stand against us and the God we represent.

Suffering does not necessarily entail physical harm even though for some people it has.

It may mean being shunned by people we love, or it may mean being made fun of by people we thought we could respect. Christians in this country have experienced a form of suffering by being excluded from many areas of life which in the past were intertwined with our lives.

If you think this isn't so try to pray in a public school, or put up a manger scene on a public place. In some parts of the country it's illegal to gather in your home to have a bible study. But you know, the issue isn't suffering, it's how much do you love the God who loved you and gave His Son for you that you might have eternal life?

If someone has claimed to trust Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and yet is willing to turn from Christ because of any opposition, my question is, in that case, was there really any commitment to the God of heaven and earth in the first place?

I would rather tell people up front that following Christ means taking up His cross, and not have them be surprised when trials may come their way, then to tell someone that Christianity is a bed of roses and then have them be disappointed in me, or worse, in God, when they experience those trials.

The bottom line is, would you rather have a few trials in life because of your faith in Christ, knowing that you will spend eternity with your God, rather than to reject Christ because of the cost of following Him, but being eternally separated from Him in hell?

To me there seems to be no question. Here's what the apostle Peter says:

1PE 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved

genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

His grace is sufficient and He will bring us through any trial, and even in the trial He is strengthening us and equipping us to come out as gold which is refined by fire.

In Christ we have nothing to fear. In fact, we have every reason to rejoice and give thanks every day of our lives because the Creator and God of the universe has seen fit to love us so much that He would humble Himself to become a man and die for the penalty of our sins and then rise victoriously from the grave.

If He would do all of that so that we might be reconciled to Him, do you think for a moment that He would love us any less when hard times come, or when suffering of any kind would come our way because of our love for Him?

Rejoice that you're a child of the King.

ROM 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

ROM 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."