

1 Thess. 2:13 (WCF 1:4-5) “The Authority of Scripture”

For the Children: If you visit a friend, who orders you around – “Make my bed! Clean up my room!” – you might say, “Do it yourself!” If dad or mum gives the same order, you probably won’t say, “Do it yourself!” Why not? Because dad and mum have authority over you, given by God. Your friend does not have that authority. When God tells us to believe something, to trust something, to obey a law or avoid a sin, we should listen even more. For no one has more authority over us than God. God’s children are those who claim we have accepted that authority. **Questions:** Why should we listen to what the Bible says? Was the Bible created by God or by men? How can we show that we accept the authority of God’s Word?

Introduction:

First Point: Receiving the Word

- 1) Receiving and Accepting: The Thessalonians “received” the Word preached by Paul and Silvanus – they heard it with their ears. But they also “accepted” it, a word that implies they received it inwardly, approved and welcomed it
- 2) What It Really Is: They accepted the message not as the word of mere men, but for what it really is, the Word of God. Of course, the Lord used men as heralds and mouthpieces to deliver it. The Thessalonians did not despise the role of the messengers, as 1:5ff shows. They recognized God’s commission to the heralds and imitated their faith. Nevertheless, they realized that the Word came ultimately from God, its Author, with His authority. The authority was not that of men, with their wisdom, philosophy, culture, opinions etc.
- 3) Authority and the Canon: That view of Scripture’s authority answers questions about the “canon” of Scripture – the Books that form our primary standard. Was the Bible created by the church, when it decided on the Books that belonged in God’s Word (at the Council of Carthage, 397 AD)? While it is true that the Church tested various books and rejected some, the criteria they used were from the Bible itself: was the Book already *accepted* by the church? Did it “perform its work” by changing lives? Was it approved by prophets or apostles commissioned by God? Did it show the mark of God’s authority? Was it authentic and consistent with the rest of the Bible? In the end, the Council accepted what the church had already been accepting for centuries. The church had already been accepting these Books because God was keeping His promise to guide His people into all truth by Word and Spirit – His witness to the Word, which stands far above human witness. See Eph. 2:20; 1 Jn. 4:1f; Jn. 16:13 and 1 Jn. 5:9. The early church did not create the Bible, they simply accepted God’s authority in creating it. See WCF 1:4

Second Point: Demonstrating the Word

- 1) Performing Its Work: The Word of God always “performs its work” in the believer – though not in a positive sense in those who do not believe. See Is. 55:11. Word and Spirit together transform the lives of God’s people. This performance must be demonstrated in the believer’s life
- 2) The Work of Faith: This performing of the Word’s work in us begins with the creation of faith. We do not create our own faith. That faith involves a love of God’s Word, causing us to delve into the Bible regularly. If we do not pay much attention to God’s Word, that casts doubt on our claim to have accepted its authority, as well as our claim to love the Lord and His Word
- 3) The Work of Thanksgiving: Accepting the authority of God’s Word should also result in gratitude for Christ’s saving work. Paul says he gives thanks constantly for His work of enabling the Thessalonians to accept the Word for what it really is. We should thank God for that work within us, too
- 4) The Work of Obedience: Accepting authority also results in obedience. In 1:6-10, the apostle talks about how accepting the Word caused the Thessalonians to turn from idols to the living God. WCF 1:4 makes a similar connection between authority and obedience. There is no excuse for our passive disobedience, our rationalizations, and our tendency to see disobedience as having little to do with a rejection of God’s authority

Conclusion: