

Message #6**I Thessalonians 2:13-20**

Why do you go to church to listen to some guy preach? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Why take the time out of your life to get in your car and drive somewhere to listen to some person like me stand up and preach for 35-40 minutes?

I am sure that there are a variety of answers to that question. Some go because that is what is expected on Sunday. It is a habit. It is a ritual. It is what we do. Some go because they like the guy who is the pastor, which incidentally, is no big threat here. Some go because it is a social thing. You get to mingle with people you typically don't get to see during the week. Some go to promote their agenda. There are some who look at a congregation as a group to market a product or philosophy.

But that is not why the Thessalonians went to church. They went for one reason, to hear the Word of God. That was their goal. J. Vernon McGee said if you are not going to church for the purpose of hearing the Word of God, you are "wasting your time" (*I Thessalonians*, p. 383).

This Thessalonian church was a model apostolic church. In fact, the Apostle Paul said that. He said that the Thessalonians were an example to "all the believers" (1:7) and that the "word of the Lord" had sounded forth from this church all over the world (1:8). The reason why this was such a model apostolic church was because their focus was the Word of God. What Paul says here is this:

THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH WAS SUCH A WONDERFUL CHURCH TO THE APOSTLES BECAUSE OF ITS GREAT FOCUS ON THE WORD OF GOD.

Last Sunday, between our first and second service, we received a phone call from a Sunday School teacher in South Carolina who called to thank our church for the website. He said that he loves the way our focus is on teaching the Word of God. That focus was exactly the focus of the Thessalonian church.

That is exactly what excited Paul about this church and that is why this church had such a focus and understanding on true biblical prophecy. Only people with a deep focus on the written Scriptures will truly grasp biblical prophecy. Now in this section of Scripture, there are five points Paul wanted to communicate to the Thessalonians:

**COMMUNICATION POINT #1 – Paul thanked God for their reception of the Word of God.
2:13**

Three times the noun "word" (λογος) shows up in **verse 13**. This church was focused on the Word of God. As we said, this is what made this church so special. It had a tremendous focus on the Word of God. Paul brings out three commendable word reception features:

**(Word Commendable Reception Feature #1) - The Thessalonians received God's Word.
2:13a**

This was a key point Paul already made in chapter 1 and verse 6. This is what was so unique about this Thessalonian church. These people went to hear God's Word so they could apply it to their lives.

Now the participle "receive" (παραλαβοντες) means that you receive something from another person (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 341). The Thessalonians actively went to church to take in God's Word. The aorist tense of the participle would indicate that this was the point of the action every time they went. In other words, their whole focal point of going to church was not cake or cookies, or punch and donut holes; it was God's Word. These people loved to hear God's Word.

They did not get mad when it convicted them. They did not care if it stepped on their toes. They went to hear the Word and to receive the Word. They truly believed that if they went to hear men teach the Scriptures, they were actually hearing from God.

We are truly getting a sense of why this church was so special to the Apostle Paul. It stood out because it was a church where the people went to receive the Word. They did not go to church because it had a good youth program or senior's group. They did not go to church because it had children's programs; they all went to hear the Word of God.

(Word Commendable Reception Feature #2) - The Thessalonians did not view Paul's teaching as being man's word. 2:13b

The vast majority of people view the Bible as just another book written by a bunch of men. You would have never sold that mindset to the Thessalonians. When they went to church, they viewed it as not going to hear from some book man wrote, but as a book God wrote. Any person who views the Bible as just a word that comes from men is making a fatal and eternal mistake.

Now the main teacher of the Word for this Thessalonian church was Paul. If you are going to hear the Word, someone must teach the Word. He was the main guy. I want to carefully point out that Paul clearly says that the Word was taught by "men" (ανθρωποι), not "women."

The Apostle Paul clearly taught that the public teaching of the Word of God at church is to be taught by men and not women. In fact, he specifically said, "I do not allow a woman to teach..." (I Timothy 2:12). This is a reference to the public teaching of the Scriptures in a worship, church setting. You will never convince me, in light of Scripture, that God ever sanctions a woman preacher. God speaks through men who accurately teach His Word.

Now when these Thessalonians went to church to hear men preach the Word, they did not view it as the word of men, which of course means that the men preaching were preaching the Word. Many churches waste people's time because they are not carefully teaching the Word.

When you go to a church where the minister is not given over to carefully expounding the Scriptures, you are listening to men. But if the man is carefully handling and rightly dividing the Word, you are not listening to the word of men.

Last week I was watching Christian TV and some minister, who really had not been carefully preaching the Word, still had five to eight minutes left in the program. So he lowered his voice to a soft spoken tone and started asking people to come forward, but no one did. So he walked down in front of the church and started asking them again to come forward and no one did. Then he asked someone to go to the piano and play something soft to set the mood and then he asked people again to come forward and no one did. In five to eight minutes you could accurately handle several verses in teaching your flock. But this guy wasn't doing that. I thought to myself, this man is not preaching God's Word; he is trying to manipulate people. In that context, the people are not hearing the Word of God; they are listening to the word of a man. That was not true in the Thessalonian church.

(Word Commendable Reception Feature #3) - The Thessalonians did view Paul's teaching as being God's Word. **2:13c**

The Thessalonians accepted the Word that was preached for what it truly is: the Word of God. The people of this church were an example to all believers, because their view was when men teach us the Word, we are hearing the true Word coming from God.

This is what accurate communication of God's Word actually is; it is not the word of the preacher, it is the Word of God. Unfortunately many, if not most, ministers are not really studying to rightly divide the Word so they can preach it accurately. Dr. Haddon Robinson said, "A significant number of ministers, many of whom profess a high regard for the Scriptures, prepare their sermons without consulting their Bible at all...the sacred text serves as an appetizer to get a sermon underway...the main course consists of the preacher's own thought" (*Biblical Preaching*, p. 25).

That is not how it worked in Thessalonica. The Thessalonians would not stand for that. They went to church to hear the Word and when they heard it accurately communicated they took it as the Word of God.

COMMUNICATION POINT #2 – Paul thanked God because the church became a great imitator of the churches in Judea. **2:14-15**

Now carefully observe what you must have to actually have a true church. To be a true church of God, you must be "in Christ Jesus." There is no such thing as a real church that is not "in Christ Jesus." What does that mean? It means that a true church is comprised of people who have believed in Jesus Christ and have been positionally linked to God by virtue of the fact that the Holy Spirit has actually connected the believers with everything Christ accomplished on the cross, thus connecting those believers to God. Paul uses the noun order "Christ Jesus," because Thessalonica was heavily Jewish.

We have already seen that the Thessalonians became imitators of the apostles, loving the Word even in tribulation (1:6). Now Paul brings out another fact. These Thessalonians became imitators and mimickers of the Judean churches in loving God's Word when suffering. You could not shake this church from their focus on Jesus Christ and the Word of God, no matter what you did.

A focus on God's Word has the ability to generate terrible opposition, especially in religion. You make your focus to go to church to hear God's Word and you will soon learn lots of religious people oppose you and your church. These Thessalonians stood for the Word of God and they suffered for it.

Now the specific way the Thessalonian church imitated the Judean churches was by suffering at the hands of their own countrymen. Two things that can cause a church to become very powerful is the Word of God and suffering. **It has been observed that no real revival has ever come without the Word and without suffering.**

Now the Judean churches had suffered greatly from the Jews and Paul knew all about that because prior to him coming to faith in Jesus Christ, he led the charge against the churches in Judea. Ultimately, Paul himself suffered many things for his defense of Jesus Christ.

There is a divine identification link between the people who actually did the things mentioned here and those who try to stop people from hearing the Word by causing them difficulty in Thessalonica. Paul lumps them all together. There is, in God's mind, guilt by association. Now these kinds of people did five horrible things:

(Horrible Action #1) - They killed the Lord Jesus . 2:15a

The nation Israel is guilty of killing Jesus Christ. Specifically, notice who these Jewish people killed—the Lord, Jesus, which means the God, Savior. The reason the Thessalonians were suffering is because many Jews, who were responsible for killing Christ, were making life difficult for them. By the way, most Jews today still kill Jesus Christ verbally, not physically. Bring up Jesus Christ to a Jew and you will see nothing has changed since the days of Paul.

(Horrible Action #2) - They killed the prophets . 2:15b

The prophets took the Word of God to the people and the religious leaders hated them and killed them. Paul faced terrible opposition in Thessalonica from the Jews and this nation has a track record of hating the true Word of God as it relates to Jesus Christ.

(Horrible Action #3) - They drove us out . 2:15c

Keep in mind that these are religious people who love the Law. They hate Paul's message of grace and when he went to Thessalonica, they hated him and drove them, or persecuted them to the point that they had to leave town. Paul wanted these Thessalonians to realize your love for the Word is that which causes the religious world to hate you.

(Horrible Action #4) - They did not please God. **2:15d**

That participle “please” (αρεσκω) is interesting. It is present tense which means nothing these religious people ever did at any time was agreeable or pleasing to God. In other words, their entire existence in religion wasn’t worth anything.

(Horrible Action #5) - They were hostile to all men. **2:15e**

Religious people who reject the Word are hostile to all men. How are they hostile to all men? The answer is by trying to stop the truth of God and the grace of God from reaching them.

Believers in Thessalonica had been persecuted by their own citizens for standing for God’s Word. In Acts 17:5-8, Jason was one such example. The Thessalonians suffered verbal assaults, emotional assaults and physical assaults for their commitment to the Scriptures.

I do not think much has actually changed. If you go to church to simply hear the Word of God, you will suffer ridicule. If you aren’t going for the programs or for the bands or for the entertainment or for the hoopla, you will suffer some ridicule.

If your passion is to go to church to hear God’s Word, you will discover you will come under some form of attack.

COMMUNICATION POINT #3 – God will pour out His wrath against any who have hindered people from hearing His Word. **2:16**

Now the religious Jews were trying to stop Paul from taking the grace message to the Gentile world. His message was any who believe in Jesus Christ may be saved. You are justified by faith and not works. Paul says these people do not realize that they are storing up wrath. In Greek, the text presents the idea that there is a specific day of wrath coming against Israel because she killed Jesus Christ and because she has tried to stop any who preach the truth about Him.

Now some have said this is a prediction to A.D. 70 when Titus would go to Jerusalem and slaughter Jews. Some have said it refers to the blindness that is on Israel, which is certainly true. It seems to me that Paul is speaking of a specific time of wrath in which Jews in Thessalonica and the Gentile world would reach a completed level of wrath. This will be in the time of Jacob’s trouble during the Great Tribulation. This will be the time when Jews all over the world will see a persecution the likes of which she has never seen before.

The specific reason for this is her sin of killing Jesus Christ and of preventing the truth of God’s Word and grace to go forth. God permits sin to run its full course. He lets the measure of sin fill up and when it reaches the level that He has determined, His wrath will come.

COMMUNICATION POINT #4 – The apostolic team had a desire to see the Thessalonians but were prevented by Satan. **2:17-18**

That word “hindered” (εγκοπτω) is one that means to hinder something by cutting into it (*Ibid.*, p. 155). Satan knew that this church was dedicated to the Word of God and he did not want Paul there teaching, so he cut into his plans. We may be sure of this—whatever the plan of God is, Satan will try to stop it. Paul loved this church because it loved the Word.

He longed to get back to it. In fact, when he said that they were “berift of you,” he actually means we have been orphaned from you, as a parent would be from a child (*Ibid.*, p. 53). Satan was the one behind the trouble that was trying to prevent Paul from getting back to Thessalonica where the people loved the Word of God. What Jesus Christ is focused on building, which is his church, Satan is focused on destroying.

COMMUNICATION POINT #5 – Paul anticipated a wonderful reunion with the Thessalonians at the coming of the Lord. **2:19-20**

Paul looked forward to the future and to the moment he would be reunited with the Thessalonians. Paul expected to one day receive a victors crown in connection with this Thessalonian church in the future. They were, as it were, his pride and joy as to what a church was supposed to be. They were people who were zeroed in on the Word.

Paul always kept his sights on the future. They gave him hope to keep going, they gave him joy, they brought him glory, but also they brought God glory. Paul did not want to go to heaven empty-handed. He believed that there would be a wonderful reunion of believers who loved the Word in heaven.

This was one church focused right and he believed that the day when the rewards would be handed out was at the coming of Jesus Christ when we are in His presence.

Now carefully observe from this context as to exactly who it is that Christ is coming to get. He is coming to get the “in Christ” people of His church (**2:14**).

The words “at His coming” literally read in Greek “in the of Him coming” (εν τη αυτω παρουσια).

This is speaking about a specific coming of the Lord for His Church. This is a reference to the Rapture of the Church. It is clear that by the time Paul writes his second letter to the Thessalonians they had become fuzzy in their eschatology.

We may recall at the end of chapter 1, Paul says they would be delivered from the wrath time of the Tribulation. Now at the end of chapter 2, Paul says we are waiting for the Lord to come get us. So this clearly teaches the Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, there is nothing better you can do than to invest your Sundays in church hearing the Word of God. When you get before the Lord, you will never regret that. This is what Paul said to the Thessalonians.