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The Word of God

One of the things Peter was known for in his life was the fact that he witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ! (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-21)

At the beginning of Christ's third year of ministry (cf. Matthew 17), the Lord and three of His disciples; Peter, James, and John, ascended a mountain (whose identity we do not know). As they climbed, Jesus took on the form in part of what He was prior to His incarnation and what He would assume when once He ascended into glory. Christ's face began to shine like the sun! His clothes became white and radiant with dazzling light! Then Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Christ. Soon after, a bright cloud overshadowed them all and a voice rang out, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5)!

Talk about amazing! If you wanted confirmation of the reality of Christ in that day, no doubt you could go to Peter and ask him to tell again the incredible day he witnessed the transfiguration of Christ! And yet, if we actually could have asked Peter about this, you know what he would say? *You want confirmation/proof about God or Christ, don't listen to my story of the Transfiguration of Christ; look to the word of God!*

2 Peter 1:16b-19a, "...we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased'- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. [Yet] we have [a greater certainty] the prophetic word..."

In other words, if you are going to stake your life on the truth of God, His glory, Salvation, and the claims of Christ, don't look to a miracle, look to the word and what it says! It is more reliable than a miracle.

In a day which says, "Seeing is believing," this may sound amazing! Yet it is not a surprise when you come to understand what we have been given in this Book! Is this just a book like any other book you may have on a shelf at home? Is there something more to this than just leather, paper, and print? What is this "deposit" that you hold in your hands?

Paul focuses upon the word of God in 1 Thessalonians 2:113-15. Here is his description of what we have:

1 Thessalonians 2:13, "And for this reason [What reason? Paul is about to give it...] we ALSO constantly thank God..."

Do you see the "also" in the text? It brings us back to 1:2 where Paul began this epistle with thanking God for the fidelity of the Thessalonian church. With his description of what made the Thessalonians so faithful (1:2-10), Paul transitioned to a defense of his personal fidelity as a minister (2:1-12). That having been accomplished, Paul picked up where he left off in 1:2 with a second reason he was thankful to God: the Ministry of the word of God in the lives of the Thessalonians! In light of that, what we have here truly is A Cross-Section of the Word of God- what we might call an anatomy of God's Word

[Its Understanding, v. 13a.](#)

1 Thessalonians 2:13, "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God."

Having expressed his thanks to God for the fidelity of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:2), Paul now expresses his gratitude for the working of God's word in them. Now the first thing that stood out to Paul in this regard was that the Thessalonians accepted the word of Paul's message as coming from God Himself- in fact "word of God" is in the emphatic position here¹! At the outset, Paul is thoroughly amazed that the Thessalonians accepted Paul's preaching as God's Word; clearly that

was not the natural thing to do! G. K. Beale wrote of this verse:

Thanking God for something assumes that what we are thanking him for is something he has done for us and not something we partly brought about by ourselves (see also 3:9, 12–13; 5:18, 23–24). Paul thanks only God because without God’s prior inward work the readers would not have been able to receive the word. (Beale, 2003, p. 78)

Beale hit it on the head! Look at the text again, “...for this reason we also constantly thank God... that you accepted [God’s word]², *for* what it really is, the word of God!” This is quite significant- amounting to nothing less than an attribute of God’s Word!

Throughout church history there have been many professed non-believers who have made a living from studying God’s word. For example, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) was a German theologian and professor of New Testament at the University of Marburg- he was a liberal. He also was one of the developers and so leaders of the Form Critical movement. He essentially taught that when everything has been said and done concerning the NT, the only thing we can know for certain is that in the first century a man named Jesus was crucified by Rome. We don’t know who he was or what he taught, only THAT he existed. Bultmann used to say, “It is not the ‘what’ of Jesus that is important, but the ‘that’ of Jesus.” Pretty bad, huh?

In spite of this, I have been told that Bultmann was an excellent exegete of Scripture writing many decent commentaries on the New Testament!

From this we see that you don’t need to be saved in order to explain accurately the text of Scripture... you just need to know the Greek and Hebrew language really well. Yet (1) to accept the Bible as God’s word... (2) to understand the text NOT as a Greek, but as a Hebrew and so have it change your life... (3) to receive the word of God and so be fed by it... from our text this morning we learn that this is an act of God! The Thessalonians, “accepted [the Bible] not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.” How we need to understand this!

We know that non-Christians can’t “understand” God’s word- not savingly and so not essentially.

Matthew 11:25, “At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from *the* wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.’”

We all understand that for a person to understand God’s word, the Lord must open their eyes! There is no question in Scripture.

Matthew 13:13, “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

The non-Christian cannot understand God’s word in any way related to salvation!

1 Corinthians 2:14, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually

appraised.”

Do you understand? For any person to accept this- God’s word- and so understand it salvifically is a testimony of the grace of God! God must open their eyes!

2 Corinthians 4:3-4, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

There is no question, the non-Christian cannot understand God’s word, savingly or essentially! They are blind to spiritual realities! They might know Hebrew/Greek and so be in a position to comment on the language structure of a verse, but they cannot thereby know the God of the word and so His words of life!

And yet we must not be deceived when it comes to the Christian... salvation does NOT bring with it a *de facto* understanding of God’s word! Following the crucifixion of Christ, two of His disciples were walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus:

Luke 24:14-16, “And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and *began* traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.”

These are saved individuals and when the Living Word approached them, they could not see... “their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.” You say, “*That’s Jesus Himself whom they didn’t recognize, not the Word. We presume they understood the Word; it is just that on account of the shock of Christ’s crucifixion they didn’t recognize the Lord!*” Really? After they articulated their confusion concerning God’s word and the report of the women who said they saw Christ, the text continues:

Luke 24:25-27, “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Understanding God’s word even as believers comes only as God opens our eyes and enables us to see! This is why the Psalmist, who loved God, prayed this way:

Psalms 119:18, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law.”

The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture is, simply stated says, “Not all things are alike plain unto themselves, but that which is necessary for salvation is clearly discernable on the pages of Scripture.” For example, if you dropped the word of God from a plane into the camp of a native population that had never heard of Christianity AND provided they could read, they could come to an understanding of salvation just from reading the word of God. But beyond this... spiritual wisdom, understanding, and discernment would not be a given; it is a gift of God that comes as the

Lord wills.

James 1:5, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

Many have prayed according to this verse so many times in their lives. The ability to understand God's word and so apply it is nothing less than a gift of God! That is why we read of the disciples who knew and loved the Lord questioning what Christ was saying:

John 16:17-18, "*Some* of His disciples therefore said to one another, 'What is this thing He is telling us, "A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me"; and, "because I go to the Father"?' And so they were saying, 'What is this that He says, "A little while"? We do not know what He is talking about.'"

Spiritual understanding comes NOT merely from sweat-equity, BUT most certainly as God opens our eyes and illumines our hearts! Working hard to know God's word is essential... but ultimately it is God who must open our eyes, even as Christians!

That is the first thing we glean from our passage when it comes to an attribute of God's Word: Understanding it is a Gift of God's Grace!

Christian, you ever find yourself struggling with understanding God's word? Understanding not only its theology, but more importantly how it applies to your life? What you are seeking is a gift of God's grace which if you desire it, you must ask for it and be willing to pay for it!

Jacob wrestled with God all night that the Lord might grant the blessing of His grace to him... in fact, the wrestling match would cripple him physically... but it was worth it (Genesis 32:24-25)! Christian, let us NOT say that we asked one time for God to open our eyes and when He didn't, we stopped reading because we were bored or it was too hard! You want to be a man or a woman of God? It is going to cost you! My questions are these: Will you wrestle with God in His word that He might give you a greater glimpse at "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God"? Are you willing to be inconvenienced, malnourished, or even maimed that you might come to understand better the word of God? The words of Job ought to humble us:

Job 23:12, "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

At that time and place, "necessary food" wasn't breakfast, but the first meal one might have in four or five days! Yet Job valued God's word above that life-sustaining meal! Does this reflect your hunger to understand and know God's word? I hope you have a sense of "Eureka" in your walk with God! Understanding God's word is NOT a right of salvation; it is something that God gives by grace, and so something for which we must ask and long! Notice a second Attribute of God's Word...

[Its Purpose, v. 13b.](#)

1 Thessalonians 2:13b, "and for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you

received from us the word of God's message..."

The word used for "received" is quite significant; it is παραλαμβάνω (*paralambanō*). In classical Greek, it was used in the context of the many philosophical schools of the transmission of knowledge that was handed down from the teacher. In this regard, the word spoke NOT MERELY of a philosophical thought or concept, BUT a worldview which would serve as the foundation upon which a life would be built. In this regard, emphasis was placed on the Sage who brought the word of knowledge; he was highly honored and respected.

In Paul's day where most Jews spoke Greek, this word was used in reference to the transmission of "tradition"/the oral law,³ and so an acceptance which once again involved more than just the mind, but the entire person. To be on the "receiving end" of the teaching of a Rabbi was to undergo a change in one's life.

However, there was one huge difference from how παραλαμβάνω (*paralambanō*) was used in the Greek culture vs. the Hebrew culture. In the Greek culture, the emphasis was on the sage/philosopher; he was all important. In the Hebrew culture, the emphasis was on the content that was being transmitted. And so barring such notable Rabbis as Gamaliel or Hillel, most Jewish teachers were not remembered by many. Truly, the emphasis in Judaism was on the content of the teaching, not the teacher! Kittel wrote:

In Judaism the material rather than the teacher is the binding link. Students may be grateful to teachers, but the authority rests with the law (as handed down by the prophets and exegeted by the rabbis). (Gerhard Kittel, 1985, p. 497)

And so it was in the context of the Kingdom of God. The focus of παραλαμβάνω (*paralambanō*) in the Bible is NOT the teacher NOR the theological content alone, BUT the theological content which would transform a life! In 1 Thessalonians 2 we read that the Thessalonians received the word of God from Paul, notice the end:

1 Thessalonians 4:1, "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more."

Paul knew the Thessalonians had received God's word from him NOT because they shook their heads up and down and took notes, BUT because their lives had been transformed! This is what is behind the word "received."

Colossians 4:17, "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.'"

It wasn't enough that Archippus had received a special calling of God; he must fulfill it/live it out! Again that is the focus of this term!

John 14:3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to

Myself..."-

The emphasis here is on the whole man! It is not Christ's intention to receive us only insofar as we are evangelists in God's Kingdom or Bible study leaders. When we go to heaven, our whole person will be expected and welcomed. That's the idea behind this word.

And so it is in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-13. Paul was moved to praise/worship/thanksgiving because the Thessalonians received the word of God's message and IT CHANGED THEIR LIFE! They went from being worshippers of that which is nothing, to being servants Him who is everything and so they willingly suffered for His name...

1 Thessalonians 1:5-7, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

When it comes to God's Word, Its primary purpose in the life of the child of God is to transform them into faithful kingdom citizens! It was NOT written so that we would have something to think about, muse upon, or speculate about. If this is your bag, you are misusing God's word and, honestly, at risk of grave trouble in your life.

1 Timothy 1:3-4, 6-7, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith... ⁶ For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions."

This is how Greeks are apt to receive the word of God. As Balconers, for them God's word is something to be mused upon, debated, and considered. In contrast, what was God's purpose in giving us His Word?

1 Timothy 1:5, "But the goal of our instruction is [and it is all ethical] love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

Why did God give us His word? What is its purpose when it comes to this world and God's people? God gave us His Word that we might grow in our love for Him and each other!

1 Corinthians 7:35, "And this I say for your own benefit [I'm giving you God's word here]; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord."

Family of God, this bristles hard against every one of us, I know (in our hearts we are Greeks). Nevertheless listen: if you view the word of God as a repository of truth given so that you might

think rightly, you are missing The Purpose behind God's word! It was NOT given to make us prophets, philosophers, or even orthodox theologians. RATHER, it was written to transform our living! This necessarily will begin with our minds (orthodoxy), but it must not stop there! It must spread to our orthopraxy or we haven't read the word of God as the Lord intended!

Paul, after spending eleven chapters to fix the Roman believer's orthodoxy, wrote:

Romans 12:1-2, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Do you understand why God gave you this book? It is so that we might learn it, know it, and so practice it! To stop with the first one- learning it- again is to place your soul in grave peril John Gerstner put it this way: "The deepest pit in hell is reserved for the theologian!" And this indeed is the case:

Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven [this is quite the confession! What does it imply by way of a person's orthodoxy? Yet this is not enough for salvation...]; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

We know that this passage has been used by so many sensitive Christians to doubt their salvation, and so we are afraid of quoting it today. Yet don't miss the point: the one who enters the Kingdom of Christ is the one who "does the will" of God- NOT perfectly, NOT faithfully, NOT all the time. Yet the overall movement of their life is one of growing in one's love and devotion to the Lord. That's why God's word was given! And that is what differentiates the true believer from the sham believer.⁴

Oh Christian, place yourself under the word of God... become a "receiver" of its teaching- which means this:

- You understand yourself to be a disciple in a religious school.
- Your purpose therefore is to come to know what this word says and so come to live by it!

Truly, as a good disciple in the many Rabbinical Schools of Paul's day, labor to place your entire being under the direction and instruction of God's word. That truly is the reason God gave you this book!

Bibliography

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End Note(s)

¹ Gordon Fee noted the unusual word order in this verse, “‘Having received the message of hearing from us of God’ [yet the] ordinary word order would be, ‘having received God’s message which you heard from us.’ By this word order Paul emphasizes... the message they heard and received was a word that came from the eternal God, not from a merely human being.” (*The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, p. 87)

² As one would accept a welcomed guest into their home- δέχομαι (*dechomai*).

³ D. M. Martin observed, “‘When you received’ translates the participial form of a verb commonly used of the reception of tradition (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9, 12; 1 Thessalonians 4:1).” (*1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, Vol. 33, p. 88). And G. L. Green observed, “The reception of teachings from a teacher by a student was commonly described using the word employed here (paralabontes), whether the teachings were those of the teacher himself (as in the case of Alexander the Great, who ‘received from his master [Aristotle] his ethical and political doctrines’) or those of an infallible tradition (as in the case of disciples, who received the Law from the rabbis). The word is employed in this latter sense in the NT in relation to the transmission of the apostolic doctrine (1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal. 1:9, 12; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6), which is here described as the word of God (cf. 1:6, 8; 4:15; 2 Thess. 3:1).” (*The letters to the Thessalonians*, pp. 139–140)

⁴ The theologian, on the other hand, who has the praise of a stone and not a man (What do good stones do? They do nothing), these are the ones who will be shocked to discover on the last day their doctrinal confession didn’t save them. They had the word of God in their laps, but they failed to use it unto its Purpose and End... the Love of Christ, Devotion to the Lord, and the Service of God’s people!