

Session 5

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 2:13–18

Scriptures

<i>I Thessalonians 2:13</i>	<i>Romans 2:16</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 2:15</i>
<i>Romans 10:14–15</i>	<i>John 6:63</i>	<i>Mark 13:1–2</i>
<i>James 1:21</i>	<i>Psalm 19:1</i>	<i>Luke 21:20–24</i>
<i>Hebrews 4:12</i>	<i>Hebrews 12:22–24</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 2:16</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:28</i>	<i>Matthew 13:58</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 2:17</i>
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I Thessalonians 2:13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

No other verse so clearly explains why the Thessalonians were such a model church than this one. Their faith grew into love, and their love into hope. They became examples to all other believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia, and from them sounded out the Word of the Lord, which proclaims Jesus as Lord.

The reason for all this was because they received the Word of God spoken to them *not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*. This divine and godly principle is at the heart of all true faith—that God’s Word has its source in God.

There is no greater example to prove what is the foundation of all true religion than Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, who after hearing God’s word spoken to them, received it not as the word of men but knew inwardly that what was heard, had its source in God.

Yet a man cannot believe until he hears, and he cannot hear until God speaks, either through the written or preached Word.

Romans 10:14–15 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

¹⁵ *And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers, Rom. 10:17

Before men can believe, there must be something for them to believe. That something is the word of God, which we preach and they hear.

If men do not believe in the divinity of the Scriptures or the prophecy brought forth from them, true faith in God cannot exist. The source of faith is the word. Consequently, without first hearing God’s word, no real faith in God can be possessed.

Ultimately, it was the preached Word brought to the Thessalonians by the apostles that produced their conversion, just as it is the preached Word, coupled with the written Word today, that saves men.

James 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Men should also be aware that rejecting the preached Word is equal to rejecting both the living (Christ) and written Word. Simply because, regardless of what form the gospel comes to men in they shall be held accountable for what they have heard of it.

Faith in the Word also reveals whether a man is humble enough to come under God's government or chooses to reject it.

When the Thessalonians received the word as the word of God and not as the word of men, their willingness to subject themselves to God's will for their life became visible.

By then faith and/or unbelief, we can ultimately determine who accepts God's sovereignty as well as any who have rejected it, since none can come into contact with God's true Word and not have their own heart revealed in the process.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

By God's Word the hearts of men are revealed, and by God's Word are the thoughts and intents of the soul brought to the surface. Thus, none can be exposed to the true Word of God and not subsequently have their own inner feelings and motives revealed in the process.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Heb. 4:12

And is a discerner of the thoughts -... It is true that God searches the heart, and knows the thoughts, but that is not the truth which is prominent here. It is, that the thoughts and intents of the heart are brought out to view by the Word of God. And can anyone doubt this? see Romans 7:7. Is it not true that people are made to see their real character under the exhibition of the truth of God? That in the light of the Law they see their past lives to be sinful? That the exhibition of truth calls to their recollection many long-forgotten sins? And that their real feelings are brought out when the truth of God is proclaimed? Men then are made to look upon their motives as they had never done before, and to see in their hearts feelings whose existence they would not have suspected if it had not been for the exhibition of the truth. The exhibition of the truth is like pouring down the beams of the sun at midnight on a dark world; and the truth lays open the real feelings of the sinner as that sun would disclose the clouds of wickedness that are now performed under cover of the night. Many a man has a deep and fixed hostility to God and to his gospel who might never be sensible of it if the truth was not faithfully proclaimed. The particular idea here is, that the truth of God will detect the feelings of the hypocrite and self-deceiver. They cannot always conceal their emotions, and the time will come when truth, like light poured into the soul, will reveal their unbelief and their secret sins.

It is important to remember that how the gospel is received directly determines whether or not God accepts or rejects those to whom it was presented.

In the Old Testament when men rejected God's law, the Lord rejected them, and a similar fate awaits those who reject the Son of God and His spiritual ministry today.

The Scriptures also reveal that a rejection of Jesus' heavenly ministry will produce an even greater punishment from God than what was inflicted upon sinners who rejected Moses' law.

Hebrews 10:28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.

It should never be concluded that rejecting Christ's new covenant, which provides for forgiveness for sin, the grace to be saved, and receiving a new nature from God, will not be met with punishment equal to or greater than what those who rejected God's first covenant received.

And though Jesus's new covenant speaks of grace for the sinner, this does not mean that it is devoid of judgment for those who reject it.

Hence, none can set aside God's divine government, either given through Moses or Christ, and not suffer great spiritual consequence for it.

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Heb. 10:29

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy - That is, he who renounces Christianity ought to be regarded as deserving a much severer punishment than the man who apostatized from the Jewish religion, and if he ought to be so regarded he will be - for God will treat every man as he ought to be treated. This must refer to future punishment, for the severest punishment was inflicted on the apostate from the Jewish religion which can be in this world - death; and yet the apostle here says that a severer punishment than that would be deserved by him who should apostatize from the Christian faith. The reasons why so much severer punishment would be deserved, are such as these - the Author of the Christian system was far more exalted than Moses, the founder of the Jewish system; he had revealed more important truths; he had increased and confirmed the motives to holiness; he had furnished more means for leading a holy life; he had given himself as a sacrifice to redeem the soul from death, and he had revealed with far greater clearness the truth that there is a heaven of glory and of holiness. He who should apostatize from the Christian faith, the apostle goes on to say, would also be guilty of the most aggravated crime of which man could be guilty - the crime of trampling under foot the Son of God, of showing contempt for his holy blood, and despising the Spirit of grace.

To despise Christ is equal to despising the holy Creator, God, simply because no one has properly revealed the Father more than the Son.

The Father and the Son are One; therefore, to reject one is to reject the other.

With greater exposure to the Lord Jesus also comes greater accountability to Him. Jesus was greater than Moses, and because He was willing to die for men's sins and was God's only begotten Son, rejection of Him will result in even severer punishment than rejecting Moses's law.

II Thessalonians 1:7-8 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Jesus Christ's second appearance, those who *know not God* or who have chosen to *obey not the gospel* of His Son shall be punished. This is the Day of the Lord, when through the Son of God and by the Word of the Lord, God shall judge the secrets of all men's hearts.

Romans 2:16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

Because of their astute spiritual perception, the Thessalonians realized that the gospel Paul and his companions brought to them had its origin not in man but in God.

Knowing that the gospel was from above and sent from God prompted them to believe it.

Because the Thessalonians believed that the Word preached to them had its source in God, they heartily and with great joy received its message.

Thus, at the base of all true belief lies the internal confidence that the Word of God can be trusted because of its spiritual nature and divine source.

This is what made the Thessalonians' faith so unique, and it is also what distinguishes those called by Christ today.

Jesus's sheep recognize His voice and perceive that it comes from Him, and upon hearing, they will seek to obey His commands.

Jesus said that His words were both Spirit and life, and this is true concerning the entirety of the gospel:

John 6:63b The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

This means that the words of Christ contain the life and presences of God. Just as God breathing into Adam's nostrils brought life to his organic body, so too has God's breath brought life and holiness to the Scriptures.

For this reason the Bible is so vastly different than any other secular book ever written. Since it originated in God, His spiritual life remains present within it.

In truth, the Word of God is supernatural in every respect. Because it is given to us by God's own person, it contains His own Spiritual power.

There is nothing so impactful, moving, or transformative as the Word of God, the same Word of God that at creation brought forth all things, material and living, that surround us today.

Hence, by God's word came light out of darkness, and by God's word both the heavens and earth were formed. All that is both natural and celestial in the known universe can be traced back to a living and spiritual God, who through His own spoken word created all forms of matter and life.

It is also through creation that God's spiritual glory is revealed. Hence, by observing the heavens, men can perceive the supernatural glory that is God's.

Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Benson Commentary, Ps. 19:1

The Hebrew, מְסַפְּרִים, *mesapperim*, is literally, *they tell*, or, *preach*, the glory of God. And this language of the heavens is so plain, and their characters are so legible, that all, even the most barbarous nations, that have no skill either in languages or letters, are able to understand and read what they declare. *The firmament* — Or, *the expansion*, all the vast space extending from the earth to the starry heavens, and especially the atmosphere, comprehending that fluid mixture of light, air, and vapours, which is everywhere diffused about us; and to the influences of which are owing all the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth, and all vegetable and animal life: all these by their manifold and beneficial operations, as well as by their beauty and magnificence, *show his handiwork* — As Creator, Preserver, and Governor. The excellence of the work discovers who was the author of it, that it did not come by chance, nor sprung of itself, but was made by a Being of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness.

Noteworthy is the fact that the Scriptures are a window into the higher spiritual realm, where God lives and maintains His being.

Thus, by God's Word and His Holy Spirit, an entirely different realm is open to man: the spiritual, heavenly, and celestial realm where God; His Son, Jesus Christ; and all divine beings abide.

Hebrews 12:22–24 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

²³ *To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,*

²⁴ *And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

What is revealed here is what faith in God opens to sinners like ourselves: a breathtaking snapshot of heaven and the wonders of believing souls who have gone before us, abiding with the Son of God even now.

God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and His spiritual realm is where the spiritual lives of the holiest who have ever walked the earth now maintain residence.

Which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

When the Word of God is believed, it will prove itself to be of God through what it accomplishes in the lives of those who have believed. Ultimately, believing the truth will supernaturally bring a man into God's presence since none can believe the truth and not simultaneously experience supernatural change within themselves.

The Greek word for *effectually* is #1754 “*energēō* (from 1722 /en, ‘engaged in,’ which intensifies 2041 /érgon, ‘work’) – properly, energize, working in a situation which brings it from one stage (point) to the next, like an electrical current energizing a wire, bringing it to a shining light bulb.”

God's Word will prove itself as divine by its ability to move things, even men's hearts, from one point to another. This includes the conversion of sinners, the healing of diseased bodies, the bringing of peace to a troubled soul, or anything else whereby God's power changes things.

This teaches us that there is no such thing as blind faith for those who believe. Since through belief, the spiritual power of the Word of God will be experienced, and men will be brought into an awareness that God does exist. He who believes the gospel, therefore, will be given personal proof of God's existence through the spiritual power felt in his life.

None also can sincerely believe the truth and not experience the mighty power of God in the process.

The opposite of this, though, is where because of unbelief the power of the gospel remains hidden.

Matthew 13:58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Though Jesus had the power to do many supernatural works and demonstrate God's mighty power to all men, because some did not believe, this power remained hidden.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Matt. 13:58

He did not many mighty works there.—In St. Mark the language is stronger, "He *could* do no mighty works there." The wonder-working power was not absolute and unconditioned, but depended on the faith of those who came to Him. Without that, the will and the power were alike thwarted.

By this we can see that both faith and unbelief have consequences. Where as, faith reveals the Lord even more to men, unbelief estranges them from God and all that He wishes for their lives.

I Thessalonians 2:14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

It should be expected, yet rarely is, that true believers will be persecuted. What befell the Thessalonians is the very same thing that the churches of God in Judea had experienced.

Teaching us that regardless of physical location, persecution from those who should be the closest to us will often be the result of believing upon the Son of God.

Christ's own people sought His crucifixion, and one of His chosen disciples, Judas, betrayed Him, delivering Him also into the hands of evil men.

Matthew 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

Bengel's Gnomon, Matt. 10:36

A man shall have them of his household—his relations, servants, and acquaintances—for enemies, if he believes in Me; see Micah 7:6.

It is noteworthy that even when Paul penned the letter to the Thessalonians, he was himself suffering persecution.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I Thess. 2:14

It is an undesigned coincidence, that Paul at this time was suffering persecutions of the Jews at Corinth, whence he writes (Ac 18:5, 6, 12); naturally his letter would the more vividly dwell on Jewish bitterness against Christians.

I Thessalonians 2:15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

Hatred for Christ and the gospel should never be underestimated. So great, then, is man's hate of light that he shall often resort to murder in an attempt to extinguish it.

This was the condition of unbelief in the Jews in Jesus's day, whose carnal lives produced both violence and conflict with those around them. See, once God is removed from men's hearts, even if some form of religion is maintained, violence toward others will soon manifest itself.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 2:15

And are contrary to all men - They do not merely differ from other people in customs and opinions - which might be harmless - but they keep up an active opposition to all other people. It was not opposition to one nation only, but to all; it was not to one form of religion only, but to all - even including God's last revelation to mankind; it was not opposition evinced in their own country, but they carried it with them wherever they went. The truth of this statement is confirmed, not only by authority of the apostle and the uniform record in the New Testament, but by the testimony borne of them in the classic writers. This was universally regarded as their national characteristic, for they had so demeaned themselves as to leave this impression on the minds of those with whom they had contact. Thus Tacitus describes them as "cherishing hatred against all others" ...

In Christ's day the Jews as a people were not a good people, though they had been chosen by God. And though some would be saved, the vast majority of Israel was purposed for destruction.

The Romans' sacking of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. began this judgment, which Jesus foretold when He spoke of the temple's and Jerusalem's destruction.

Mark 13:1–2 And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!

² And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Mark 13:2

The temple was constructed of white marble, and the blocks were of a prodigious size. Josephus says that these stones were, some of them, 50 feet long, 24 feet broad, and 16 feet in thickness.

Luke 21:20–24 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

²¹ Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

²² For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

²³ But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

²⁴ And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, I Thess. 2:16

there shall not be left] Though now they seem fixed in their places for eternity. And even as He said, less than forty years afterwards, "Zion was *ploughed as a field*, and Jerusalem became heaps, and the mountain of the House as the high places of the forest" (Micah 3:12). Titus himself was amazed at the massive buildings of Jerusalem, and traced in his triumph the hand of God (Jos. Bell. Jud. vi. 9. 1). At his departure after the capture of the city, he left the tenth legion under the command of Terentius Rufus to carry out the work of demolition, and Josephus tells us (Bell. Jud. vii. 1. 1) that the whole inclosing walls and precincts of the Temple were "so thoroughly levelled and dug up that no one visiting the city would believe it had ever been inhabited."

1 Thessalonians 2:16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Sin grows until it must be dealt with. When the Jews sought to prevent the Gentiles' salvation after crucifying God's Son, the Lord's wrath was ready to be revealed. This divine wrath also would not be suppressed until it had fully accomplished its divine and righteous purpose.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, 1 Thess. 2:16

To the uttermost - Greek - *ἕως ἄκρας* *eis telos* - "to the end;" that is, until wrath shall be "complete" or "exhausted;" or wrath in the extremest degree.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, 1 Thess. 2:16

Their hindrance of the Gospel preaching to the Gentiles was the last measure added to their continually accumulating iniquity, which made them fully ripe for vengeance.

This teaches us that God considers it a great sin when people who have themselves rejected the gospel then seek to turn others away from it as well. For this sin, among others, the Jews would be both righteously and harshly judged by God.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, 1 Thess. 2:16

For. ... "The Jews have been working up to the rounded perfection of their sin; but (they had not much left to do) the wrath burst suddenly upon them to its uttermost." The word for "is come" (which should be the simple preterite "came") is the same as that used in Matthew 12:28, Luke 11:20, of a sudden, unexpected apparition. "The wrath" is the wrath from which Jesus is delivering us (1 Thessalonians 1:10), and it had already come upon the Jews, though its outward manifestation in the destruction of Jerusalem was not to come yet awhile. The particular moment at which St. Paul means that the wrath "came" must have been the moment of their final rejection of the Messiah.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

Paul does not say how he was delayed in coming to strengthen the Thessalonians' faith, only that Satan was the reason.

Just as God is real, so too is Satan. This will become very apparent when the gospel of Jesus Christ is advanced since for every movement of God, men will experience a counter-movement by the devil. One can rarely preach the Word and not at the very same time come into contact with high spiritual forces that despise both God and His Word.

It is not simply sinners who despise the truth, but also angelic rebels. God's Word is as foul and distasteful to Satan as the evil he does is to God. No creature also despises the truth more than he who from the earliest days of creation has sought to prevent men from believing it.

Satan, because he wishes to possess the worship God receives, seeks to turn men away from Him. This was Satan's purpose in Genesis, and it is still his primary purpose today: to bring doubt upon God's Word and to seek to lead people away from obedience to God.

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, and this is most evident when God's truth is spoken in a world full of Satan's mischief.