

The Word That Works

Introduction. It's nice to know that our efforts each Sunday can encourage reflection and spiritual growth. But the credit ultimately belongs to God's Word. Any good accomplished through our work is a testimony to His power, not ours.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul addressed the attitude of the Thessalonian brethren with this great observation: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

This text speaks to our attitude toward the Word. Whether we're listening to a preacher, reading an article or a blog post, or simply reading the text ourselves, our attitude is important. In fact, it becomes an occasion for all of us to "thank God without ceasing." In order to help you grow deeper in the Word and therefore strengthen your relationship with God, we're going to look at the three phrases in 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

I. We Must Receive the Word

- A. "Received" means taking in the message Paul and his companions delivered. They "collected" something that was "transmitted."
 - 1. Practically, "received" means listening with the head as well as the heart. Someone receiving a message has a receptive attitude and possesses a good and honest heart (Luke 8:15).
 - 2. In the first gospel sermon on Pentecost, the Bible says, "They gladly received the word" (Acts 2:41).
- B. When you hear a sermon, is your mind receptive to the Word, or is it an exercise in critiquing the preacher? Do we enter a Bible class with an open heart to accept what God says, or does it become a forum for arguing or projecting personal opinions?

II. We Must Accept God's Word as Truth

- A. The Thessalonians did more than hear it: They welcomed and believed it as God's Word, not merely human teaching. Receiving the Word speaks to our willingness to hear it. Welcoming or accepting the Word speaks to our conviction that it's true.
- B. Real truth does exist. In fact, the claim "there's no objective truth" presents itself as objectively true. If it's true, it undercuts itself. Thousands of facts hold true whether or not anyone believes them. The Earth was round before anyone knew it, and a past event either happened or it didn't.
- C. Understanding the reality of objective truth directs us to understand the Author and Sustainer of that truth. The Bible presents that as God.
 - 1. The Bible has veracity in and of itself. Although the way the narrative of redemption through Jesus Christ is told seems fanciful and made up, it's all within the miracle-working ability of a Creator who made all things.

2. Different disciplines (scientific fields of study, the study of prophecy, textual criticism, statistical mathematics, archaeology, etc.) support the accuracy and believability of the Scriptures. And if it's real, then it must be followed.
- D. The work of the Holy Spirit throughout recorded time has revealed God's will.
 1. God spoke in various ways but now speaks through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). His Son Jesus promised to guide the apostles into all truth through the Spirit (John 16:13).
 2. When we receive the Word and work of Jesus and the apostles, we're receiving the will of the Father (John 13:20; Ephesians 3:3-5; cp. Matthew 7:21-23).
- E. When preachers, pastors, and Bible teachers faithfully explain and correctly apply Scripture, the authority rests not in their opinions but in the Word of God. And as Jesus pronounced in His prayer in John 17:17, "Your word is truth."
 1. We diligently establish and preach authoritative practice from the Scriptures.
 2. When deciding on matters of judgment or opinion, we exercise spiritual maturity and discernment to know the difference.

III. We Must Allow the Word to Work in Us

- A. What a compliment Paul paid to the Thessalonians when he wrote that the Word "effectively works in you who believe."
 1. Many of our friends have dealt with serious, debilitating illnesses, such as Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, or ALS.
 2. What do we pray for? We pray that therapy and medicine will be effective. In other words, it'll produce the intended result and accomplish what they need in dealing with their diseases.
 - a) Because God's Word is effective, it produces a divine result. Hearts are touched, attitudes are altered, thinking is redirected, and lives are changed.
 - b) We examine ourselves so we can apply it to our lives (2 Corinthians 13:5).
What good does a sermon do if it doesn't work in us and on us?
- B. The result doesn't occur by simply acquiring Bible knowledge; it comes about by learning to trust God and respond to what is read. To make certain that you know the power of God's Word, I want to briefly show you six ways that this power can work in your life.
 1. When someone makes you angry, it can change your response.
 - a) James 1:19-20 teaches you to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Instead of immediately answering an insulting remark, you pause, listen, and choose words that don't make the situation worse.
 - b) This illustrates how Scripture can bring your will and conduct into alignment with Christ.
 2. When you recognize a wrong, it can lead you to repentance.
 - a) Hebrews 4:12-13 describes God's Word as discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. You might read about honesty and realize that you've been excusing a misleading statement.

- b) Rather than defending yourself, you admit it, ask forgiveness, and correct what you said. Scripture works not only by exposing outward actions but also by uncovering the motives behind them.
- 3. When you face temptation, it can strengthen your resistance.
 - a) Psalm 119:11 connects treasuring God's Word with resisting sin. When you're tempted to cheat, gossip, or indulge resentment, a passage you have learned can remind you of what's right and give you a reason to choose righteousness over immediate gratification.
 - b) The Holy Spirit uses the Word to strengthen believers against temptation, as shown by Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11.
- 4. When you're suffering, it can sustain your faith.
 - a) God's Word may not immediately remove a painful circumstance, but it can help you endure it with hope (Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4).
 - b) For example, remembering God's promises when you're discouraged can turn your attention from "I can't see a way forward" to "I can keep trusting God while this is difficult." Receiving the Word is connected with faith and joy amid suffering (1 Thessalonians 1:6).
- 5. When you need to make a decision, it can guide your priorities.
 - a) As an adult, Scripture doesn't name the exact job you should take or answer every practical question about where you should move. As a child, Scripture doesn't tell you what to do about work or practices on Sundays or Wednesdays, nor does it exactly explain who you should be friends with. But its teachings about honesty, love, work, devotion, and faithfulness help you evaluate your options (Matthew 6:33).
 - b) You'd turn down an opportunity that requires deception, even if it pays more. In this way, the Bible supplies moral guidance rather than a personalized answer to every decision.
- 6. When you struggle to pray, it can give you words.
 - a) This is what Jesus was doing in Luke 11:1-4 when He responded to His disciples' statement, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."
 - b) You can read Psalm 23:1-6 and pray, "Lord, help me trust you as my shepherd today." Or a passage about forgiveness can prompt you to confess resentment and ask for help forgiving someone.
 - c) Scripture becomes a starting point for praise, confession, thanksgiving, and requests — not merely something you finish reading.
- C. On top of all this, the Word also works in us to prepare its readers and doers for eternal life (Titus 3:7; 1 John 2:25).

Conclusion. Ultimately, our aim in spending time in the Word is succinctly stated by James Merritt: "The primary purpose of reading the Bible isn't to know the Bible, but to know God." The question isn't merely whether we've heard God's Word, but whether we've welcomed it, accepted it as truth, and allowed it to accomplish its work within us.

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