

1 Thessalonians 2:13 - 20
Legacy Standard Bible

13 And for this reason we also thank God without ceasing that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also suffered the same things at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and do not please God, and are hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

We come this morning to a meaty section of scripture that defines for us the dividing line of those who are in God's kingdom and those who are not. There is so much here to consider. Blessedness and thriving as opposed to wrath and rejection.

A people to be happy for in vss 13,14, a people we would want to imitate, and in vss. 15,16, a people we should be sad for and those who we would not want to be in company with. Receivers of Gods blessings, and rejecters of God who can expect only terrifying wrath.

And the line of demarcation, the defining delineation, the point of separation if you will between those who receive either wrath or blessing, destruction or thriving, is in vs. 13. The word of God. The word of God.

Beloved, the only singular reason that I am willing to stand in this pulpet each Sunday and do whatever this is that I do, no doubt poorly, is that I have a belief that this book, the words of this book, have powers beyond me.

I firmly believe and my ministry such as it is, is based on a belief in Isaiah

8 *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.*

9 *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

10 *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth,
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;*

11 *So shall **My word** be which goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

That's the basis that I operate on. I've suffered from an inferiority complex for most of my life, but I believe the words of the book have a life of their own apart from me. That's the single reason I stand here this morning.

It's my job, whether done poorly or otherwise, to get the words of this book delivered to you folks. After that, I believe they have a life of their own. What the words accomplish is not my problem. My job is to deliver them and help as best I can to "make the sense", help you understand.

And in this passage, Paul says something quite similar. Understanding what Paul is saying here in a comparison of those who have embraced the Word of God with those who have rejected, supports my premise perfectly.

For those who accept and obey the Word; thriving and blessing and eternal life.

But for those who reject the word of God, cursing, wrath, and eternal

punishment.

And that's Paul's point here as he has been listing all of the reasons he is thanking God for this little group of elect people who have responded to the gospel of God.

vs. 13 And for this reason we also thank God without ceasing that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.

For this reason, what reason? This is the reason Paul is thanking God ceaselessly about them. What is the thing, the reason Paul is remembering them thankfully in his prayers without ceasing?

The reason Paul is ceaselessly thankful about them is that when they heard the gospel of God, delivered by Paul, these folks accepted it, not as a message from men, or simply a message from Paul and Silas and Timothy, but as the very words of God to them.

The basis for everything they are, for all the fruitfulness that has happened among them both now and in the future is that they believed Paul's message was based in authority not of men, but in the creator of everything. Paul brought them the very words of God.

Where did Paul's message come from? He often refers to it as "my" gospel. And in these verses he clearly considers his message as God's word. Where did he get his message?

Paul himself recounts to us the story of how and why he can consider his gospel message as true revelation, the inspired words of God. Listen to a section from his letter to the Galatians; Paul Called by God Gal. 1:

11 For I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel which I am proclaiming as good news is not according to man. 12 For I neither

received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might proclaim Him as good news among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which are in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me.

2 1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2 And I went up because of a revelation, and I laid out to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, lest somehow I might be running, or had run, in vain. 3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 But this was because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us. 5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. 6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8 (for He who worked in Peter unto his apostleship to the circumcised worked in me also

unto the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

When Paul walked into Thessalonica and began preaching Jesus in the Jewish synagogue there, he did it with full confidence that he was unleashing the very inspired God-breathed words of God.

And the believers in Thessalonica believed the words they heard in just a brief few short weeks from Paul's mouth were given to them under inspiration from God.

Paul was whisked away for his own safety within just a very few weeks, and he hasn't heard a report about them for some months. Did the seed germinate and grow? Or did it get choked out by all of the Jewish opposition and hatred?

Was it six months that had elapsed? More? We don't know. Have they survived? Or has Satan crushed them and put the fire out? Well, when Paul learns that they have not only survived but they are thriving and growing, he tells us in these verses the reason for what has happened.

13 And for this reason we also thank God without ceasing that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God,

The difference between wheat and tares, between fruitful plants in good soil and wilted starved-out dead plants in rocky weedy soil is in that statement of Paul's about them.

Are the words of this book different than the words of every other book? Is this the revelation of God to men? Which part? All of it, or just parts of it? And if it is the revealed words of God to men, does it have authority over men? Is obedience to the commands of the morality of this book

mandatory? Is this book God breathed and therefore a mandate from God to men?

Paul is beyond thankful, unceasingly thankful to God for this group of elect people, why? Because he has found out they are in fact thriving beautifully even in his absence, and he gives us the reason; They believe this book is authoritative revelation from God.

Beloved, you can look around you and discover in the last 80 to 120 years who in christendom is still thriving and growing and waxing strong, and who is shriveled up and dieing.

The mainline denominations once thrived. You can find and read their original articles of faith. Rock solid in many cases. What happened?

Little by little, and you can trace it individually in the different groups, and for a lot of different reasons, the word of God is undermined by human reason.

It started way back in the 1880's in the industrial age. Suddenly people sitting with lightbulbs on from electricity coming long distances over wires said to themselves, we have to fix christianity. No one is going to believe in creation and miracles and such in the modern scientific age.

And so a lot of smart men began to work through the Bible and selectively decide what was inspired, and what was silly wives tales. Liberal christianity was born. That term has nothing to do with the equivalent in politics although the parallels are obvious.

Liberal politics simply took the next logical step and killed God altogether freeing men to do anything they can conceive of. No God no rules no punishment no restraints. Party on.

But liberal theologians were trying to save christianity from itself by demythologizing the Bible. Get rid of anything that can't be seen and

observed physically and scientifically. No creation. No miracles. No spirituality. Nothing but physical science.

Jesus did nothing but set a nice example for people. It was an attack on the inspiration of scripture. Suddenly scripture was under the authority of men, not the other way around.

You get the idea. Where are the once powerful denominations today? Shriveled and very nearly almost vanished. The mainline denominational churches today are rock quarries. Empty stone edifices. First emptied of spiritual power, and ultimately emptied of people. Exhibit A, the building you're sitting inside.

Paul gives the reason why. Accept this book, in it's fulness, as the very authoritative words of God as a mandate for obedience, and like the Thessalonians that he is thankful for, you thrive, or reject any or all of it as non-authoritative words of men, and . . . in time, everything evaporates to nothing.

In our time, it isn't the original liberal theologians trying to accommodate science any more that is rejecting the book. Show me a church with a woman in the pulpit or show me a church that accommodates same sex marriage and other alternative arrangements besides God's mandate of celibacy except for the singular provision of one man one woman married for life, and I'll show you a church on it's way to oblivion. Paul tells us why;

You figure out some way, some angle, some argument that dilutes and then eliminates the clear mandates of the morality of the ten commandments and thriving ceases. Because within that argument only one possibility arrives. The Bible is not written by God and it has no authority to restrain people from doing whatever sin they dream up. Pull that finger out of the dike and it's only a matter of time until the flood comes.

Exhibit B; our culture. God is dead. Do what seems right to you. Be

whoever it is you think yourself to be. How's that working out for us?

Proverbs 14:11,12 says; *11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. 12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

It's so simple. Obey the book and thrive. Ignore the book and perish. Oops. God is dead, therefore there is no book to obey. We are in a hopeless spiral into oblivion without God.

In Revelation 2 and 3 Jesus Himself wrote letters to 5 of seven churches in Asia minor that were already well on their way to oblivion. Before the end of the first century, it was already happening. And it still is. Thessalonica believed Paul's message was the authoritative word of God, and under impossible odds; thriving. Growth! Fruit! Wellness. Glory.

you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.

Accepting and obeying the word of God for what it is, the inspired authoritative revelation of God Almighty has another benefit. *which also is at work in you who believe...*

The key to the success under impossible odds of the Thessalonians was first that they accepted the word as the very Word of God, and second, the word was at work inside of them. This is kind of where I started. The word itself has powers to work wonders. In you!

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Ps. 119:9

The book works in you. It is at work inside of you who believe. I don't want to belabor this point, it's a sermon or many sermons for another day, but I can't move on without reminding you of this same truth said even more succinctly in 2 Cor. 3:18

*But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed** into the **same image** from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. X2*

That is a singular formula for spiritual growth and fruitfulness. The idea is drawn from Moses on Mt. Sinai with God, receiving the very words of God on a tablet, the 10 commandments. And when he came down from the mountain it says that he knew not that his face shown. His face glowed with the glory of God. So he put a veil over his glowing face.

Paul says, when we look into this book which contains the living words of God, it's like our faces are unveiled, and some of the glory remains on us. The book transforms us, little by little, into the image of God we were designed to be.

Feel stagnant? Feel like there's no movement, spiritually, in your life? Feel like nothing has changed in the years since you were born again? Are you staring into the glory with unveiled face? Are you spending time in the Word of God.

*you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, **which also is at work in you who believe.***

It can't work in you if you're not gazing into it. There is transformative power only for those who believe it is God's revealed authoritative word, and who spend time gazing into it.

In the case of the christians at Thessalonica, they were surviving an onslaught of persecution and stress because they believed it was God's words to them and the word was at work inside them sustaining them.

14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also suffered the same things at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,

Paul lets the Thessalonians know that they are not the first to have suffered in the style that they are suffering. In fact they are mimicking some very prestigious company.

The churches in Judea, the apostles, and Jesus Himself also suffered at the hands of so-called jews who are really the duped henchmen of Satan himself.

It'd be one thing to suffer because you're stupid and you're doing it wrong. But it's very affirming to know that you are suffering at the hands of the jews who likewise also persecuted the churches at Judea, and the apostles, and Jesus Himself, and the prophets before Him.

That's a good company to be associated with. If you're suffering is by the same hands and like unto that company, it's because you're getting it right! Satan's bringing it, because you're in the same company that he has been trying to eliminate since the days of the prophets before Jesus even got there.

That's a strong strong argument and encouragement. To be in the same line as churches and apostles and Jesus and prophets getting similar trouble from the same ultimate source, Satan, is strong encouragement. High praise to be in THAT company of people. Word of God people.

It was the jews who killed their own prophets. It was the jews who murdered Jesus. It was the jews, beginning with Stephen and led by a man named Saul, who is also penning this letter, who martyred Stephen and the apostles and the churches in Judea.

And now it's the jews at Thessalonica who have hired thugs from the market square to drag Jason out of his house (which is probably where this new church met) before the magistrates, and who are such a threat to Paul's life that the brothers shuffle him off to Berea and later to Corinth where this letter is being written.

A belief that God has spoken authoritatively through the prophets first, and then through His Son, the Lord Jesus, and then through His chosen apostles, including Paul, and a life changed through the power of those words of God revealed will bring thriving, spiritual thriving, and it will bring persecution.

By way of comparison, Paul is going to speak plainly about what happens to those who have rejected God's words. And in his time and sphere in the first century after Jesus, it is the jews that Satan uses to crush out the fire of God's gospel, God's word.

But these words that Paul will speak about his own countrymen are equally true of whoever Satan is using at the present time to try to crush the spread of the Word of God. It isn't the jews currently who are restraining God's word and God's people.

In our current scenario it is secularism that would like to crush God and His book and His people out of existence. The elite's see us as knuckle draggers who have a restraining influence on personal freedoms. Absolute personal autonomy where each person is his own god and makes his own rules is held back by our belief in God who created the worlds, and who speaks authoritatively in a book. A God with a morality at odds with secularism.

Satan will use secularism to crush christians now exactly as he used the jews to try to crush christianity out in Paul's day. Listen to Paul's words about the ultimate outcome of whoever it is that's fighting against God, God's Word, and God's people; As true today as it was then, just the dupes have changed;

15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and do not please God, and are hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to

the utmost.

Satan is at war with God, and as Solomon said 3500 years ago, nothing is new under the sun. The hostility is still present, only the names have changed. Satan is a murderer and a liar.

Satan will use his dupes to kill christians if he can. Ultimately Satan can do nothing to us without the go ahead from God. That's why Luke 21 says:

16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. 17 And you will be hated by everyone because of My name. 18 Yet not even a hair of your head will perish.

Satan can only do what God allows. Sometimes God allows his dupes to murder christians. Satan has been murdering God's people since Cain murdered righteous Abel. God allows it for His purposes.

And yet not a hair can be touched without God allowing it. Death is pretty inefficient. Satan far more often works to hinder christians. See it in vs. 16?

16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved

In our current cultural scenario, hindering speech has become extremely important in Satan's working to stamp out the gospel. There are dozens of laws written and in process of trying to be passed by secular people that would hinder christians from speaking God's word and God's truth.

We are at the tail end of a time of; first benefit to christians, then tolerance of christians to a brave new world we are at the threshold of where Satan will come at us by hindering us from speaking God's truth. Mark my words. The Word of God is diametrically opposed to secularisms absolute personal autonomy. The new god. You are god of you.

The secular world has run out of patience with anyone who would use the Words of God to restrain sinful behaviour. Even saying some behaviour is sinful is enough to trigger secular people into actions to hinder us. We're on that threshold, staring over the boundary, wondering what will happen to us very shortly.

It's stunning how parallel it is in 2022 to 50AD. It's because our adversary is the same, and quite honestly, the devil isn't very imaginative. He just keeps doing the same thing for 2000 years. Nothing new going on here. Hinder christians from speaking. Restrain the Word of God.

Why is evangelicalism so stupid that it wants to figure out a way to align the church with Satan and go along to get along? We who love God and love God's word, and love our fellow countrymen so that we would want to see them thrive and be saved from eternal destruction, will be accused of being haters, if we do not fall in line with Satan who is at war with God.

And yet, that's what so-called christian churches everywhere are doing. It's a bizarre spectacle to watch. You folks need to particularly pray for God to graciously grant me wisdom as all of this unfolds. If we cave in at any point and align ourselves with Satan in his war on God, the rest of vs. 16 then applies to us.

with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

I especially want to consider the idea that God keeps track of sin by measure, and when the cup is full, wrath is poured out.

I was reading R. C. Sprouls' book, *The Holiness of God*, and he was recounting a story of when he was in seminary and he had to prepare a sermon and deliver it to his peers and his professors at the seminary.

And he spoke on grace. Marvelous infinite matchless grace. Blah blah blah. And when he was finished and the class was exiting one of his

professors told him to wait behind. Oops. Never a good thing.

And that professor said, Mr. Sproul, can you please show me in the Bible where it says that God's grace is infinite? Doh! And R. C. said he could quote chapter and verse where it says it in that hymn, but he couldn't find it in the Bible.

God's grace is NOT infinite. Paul tells us right here that God is storing up the measure of the sins in Satan's and Satan's duped humanity's war on Him, and some day, wrath will get poured out equal to that measure. A day is coming when grace is over.

Beloved, we are massively outnumbered in this war. All they can do is kill us. But my guess is that would be the easy way out. Remember, not a hair of your head will perish, unless God allows it for His purposes. But our secular enemies, duped by Satan, may very well come and take our stuff away and perhaps throw some of us in prison.

This world is filling up the measure of their sins, and many of us believe this may be the final volley before the wrath comes. We passed up Sodom and Gomorrah quite a ways back in the rear view mirror.

Why is it that we expect any better treatment than Paul got. Beatings and danger and shuffled out of town in the middle of the night to protect his very life. That's how Satan rolls. Our user-friendly-to-christians nation is changing before our very eyes.

In conclusion this morning, I want to draw you back to the single thing that is the dividing line between blessing and thriving or wrathful ultimate destruction.

The reason the Thessalonians thrived in the midst of impossible odds was that they honored and obeyed the living words of God, delivered to them by Paul. They aligned themselves in obedience to God's Holy Words. And the Word of God caused thriving inside of them, set apart from this world.

They didn't have the complete canon of scriptures, old testament and new testament, completed, in written pages, in good translations, available easily and cheaply. They thrived hanging on to little bits and pieces of God's word.

Some day those folks will be amazed to learn that we had it all at our fingertips and yet Bibles lay inside houses with dust on them, never opened. The single most damning evidence of so-called christianity today is our neglect of the complete Word of God that is available to us in total.

Our generation of christians will answer to the fact that we had it all, good translations, complete canon, easily available, at our fingertips, and we did not spend time gazing into God's face being changed. To whom much is given, much will be required.

Listen to what Jesus said in Luke chapter 12:

47 And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many beatings, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a beating, will receive but a few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required, and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

Beloved, what the Thessalonians did with the Word of God made all the difference for them. They thrived spiritually and didn't perish under intense pressure from the world. God's Word was at work in them.

Likewise, in our generation, we will be held accountable for what we do with the Words of this book. We are the generation unto whom much has been given.