

Lesson 4

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

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II. Paul's Personal Reflections [1:2-3:13]

C. Reminders for the Church [2:13-16]

1. Their Reception of the Word [2:13]

¹³ *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*

The reason Paul could thank God for the character of the Thessalonian believers in 1:2-10 [their faith, love, hope...their worthy example to others, etc.] was primarily due to the way they received the word of God. Here Paul thanks God for the manner of their receiving the word of God. In this text, we are reminded of the effectiveness of God's Word for those who believe it.

I. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOD'S WORD

A. LIVING, POWERFUL, ABLE TO DISCERN...

Hebrews 4:12 *"For the word of God is living and active"*

John 6:63 *"The words I have spoken are spirit and they are life"*

B. PRODUCES FAITH...

Romans 10:17 *"faith comes from hearing the message...of Christ"*

John 20:30-31 ³⁰ *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

C. HAS POWER TO SAVE...

Romans 1:16 *"I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"*

James 1:21 *"word...can save you"*

D. KEY TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH...

Acts 20:31 *"word...can build you up"*

1 Peter 2:2 *"crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation"*

E. HELPS TO OVERCOME SIN AND SATAN...

Psalms 119:11 *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"*

1 John 2:14 *"you are strong...the word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one"*

F. POSSESSES POWER TO SANCTIFY...

Psalms 119:9 *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word"*

John 17:17 *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth"*

[Such are the many benefits of the wonderful Word of God. But as indicated in our text, God's word must be properly received...]

II. FOR GOD'S WORD TO BE EFFECTIVE

A. MUST BE RECEIVED WITH FAITH...

1. For it works only in those “*who believe*” [1 Thess 2:13]
2. For it is God's power unto salvation to those who believe
Romans 1:17 “*The righteous will live by faith*”
3. For it does not profit those who do not receive it with faith
Hebrews 4:2 “*For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.*”

B. MUST BE RECEIVED WITH MEEKNESS...

1. The word must be received in meekness if it is to save
James 1:21 “*humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*”
2. For such is the person God is willing to guide and teach
Psalm 25:9 “*He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*”

C. MUST BE RECEIVED BY DOERS...

1. Not just hearers of the Word
James 1:22 “*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*”
2. It is in obeying the Word that our souls are purified
1 Peter 1:22 “*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*”

D. MUST BE CONSTANTLY DESIRED...

1. Like newborn babes longing for their mothers' milk [1 Pet 2:2]
2. For the one who meditates on it day and night is truly blessed [Psa 1:1-3]

We need to ask ourselves:

1. Is the living, powerful Word of God effective in our lives?
 - a. Is it producing faith, saving us by causing us to be born again?
 - b. Is it producing spiritual growth, manifested by overcoming Satan, living holy lives whether we are young or old?
2. If the Word of God is not making a powerful impact in our lives, could it be...
 - a. We are not receiving it with faith and meekness?
 - b. We are not receiving it with the intention of obeying it?
 - c. We have not fervently desired it, so that it cannot abide in us?

If such is the case, then we haven't taken the Word of God seriously. We have treated it no differently than the word of men. May the church of the Thessalonians always serve to remind us how we ought to receive it...

“when you received the word of God...you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

2. Their Suffering because of the Word [2:14-16]

¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

1. In these verses, Paul reveals how the Thessalonians suffered persecution
 - a. It was at the hand of their own countrymen [Acts 17:5-10]
 - b. In this they were imitators of the churches in Judea, who were also persecuted by their own countrymen [Acts 8:1; 12:1-4]
2. Mentioning the Judean persecution, Paul lists the sins of the Jews [1 Thess 2:15-16]
 - a. This passage might be construed by some as anti-Semitic
 - b. But it really isn't, for it comes from the heart of one who loved his Jewish brethren
Romans 9:1-5 ¹ *I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—* ² *I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.* ³ *For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,* ⁴ *the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.* ⁵ *Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.*
Romans 10:1 *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”*

[A careful consideration of these verses and related passages can provide food for thought, especially regarding the grace of God, his longsuffering, and the danger of despising it. Let's begin our consideration by looking more closely at what this passage says about...]

I. THE SINS OF THE JEWS

A. THEY KILLED THE LORD JESUS...

1. Which Peter was not hesitant to proclaim [Acts 2:23, 26; 3:14-15; 4:10; 5:30]
2. Those who were personally involved accepted responsibility for this act
Matthew 27:25 *“All the people answered, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”*

B. THEY KILLED THEIR OWN PROPHETS...

1. They killed prophets in the days of Elijah
1 Kings 19:10 *“He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”*
2. They killed prophets, including Zechariah, despite the reforms of Jehoida the priest [2 Chr 24:14-21]
3. As summarized by Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Stephen [2 Chr 36:16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30; Acts 7:52]

C. THEY PERSECUTED THE APOSTLES...

1. In Jerusalem the apostles had been beaten and threatened [Acts 5:40]
2. Ultimately there was the death of James, and the imprisonment of Peter [Acts 12:1-5]
3. Paul had been persecuted in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra [Acts 13:50; 14:1-6, 19]
4. He had been run out of Thessalonica and Berea by the Jews [Acts 17:5-10, 13-14]

D. THEY DID NOT PLEASE GOD...

1. As rebuked by Moses in the wilderness [Deut 9:7]
2. As described by God to his prophet Ezekiel [Ezek 2:3]

E. THEY WERE HOSTILE TO ALL MEN...

1. Tacitus describes them as “cherishing hatred against all others”
2. Juvenal says “They would not even point out the way to any one except of the same religion; nor, being asked, guide any to a fountain except the circumcised.”
3. Diodorus Siculus describes them as “those alone among all the nations who were unwilling to have any intermingling with any other nation, and who regarded all others as enemies”

F. FORBIDDING THEM TO SPEAK TO THE GENTILES...

1. As happened at Antioch of Pisidia [Acts 13:42-51]
2. The idea that Gentiles could now be included among God’s people was abhorrent to many Jews, as indicated by their reaction
Acts 22:21-22 ²¹ “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ” ²² *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”*
3. Even some Jewish Christians demanded that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved [Acts 15:5]

[In this manner the Jews as a nation of people had been filling up the measure of their sins, and the fullness of God’s wrath was about to come upon them previewed by the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. However, the context suggests the final wrath of God that will be unleashed during the Tribulation period before the second coming of Christ...]

Now it is important to stress that these were not the words of an anti-Semite. Paul loved his brethren in the flesh. They are simply facts of history, given objectively by a Jew who himself had been guilty of the same things! Consider how Paul described himself...

II. THE SINS OF ONE JEW [PAUL]

A. HE HAD BEEN A BLASPHEMER, PERSECUTOR, VIOLENT MAN

1 Timothy 1:12-14 ¹² “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

B. COMPELLING OTHERS TO BLASPHEME THE NAME OF CHRIST

Acts 26:9-11 ⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.”

So what is the point?

1. Certainly Paul was not anti-Semitic...
 - a. What he says was not true of all Jews
 - 1) Many had become Christians [e.g., the apostles, Paul himself]
 - 2) There were churches “in Judea” [1 Thess 2:14]
 - b. Any Jew who came to Christ would be “grafted” back in [Rom 11:23-24]
 - c. The Gentiles as a group were not much better [Rom 1:18-32]
2. But there are important lessons to be learned...
 - a. The wonderful grace of God that is available for those willing to repent
 - 1) As seen in the life of Paul
 - 2) As still extended to the Jews
 - c. The wrath of God coming upon those who refuse His grace [Rom 2:4-11]
 - 1) To those who obey not the gospel [1 Pet 4:17; 2 Thess 1:7-9]
 - 2) To those who persist in sin [Heb 10:26-31]

May these truths serve to caution us not to receive God’s grace in vain:

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 “¹ As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. ² For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

II. Paul's Personal Reflections [1:2-3:13]

D. Concerns for the Church [2:17-3:13]

1. Satan Hinders Paul's Visit [2:17-20]

¹⁷ But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

Since Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica abruptly, he had an eager desire to see them again. However, Satan had hindered them from visiting them. As he explains these truths, he also states his heart-felt expectations.

We do well to ask ourselves the same question...

- a. What is our hope? For what do we long with desire and expectation?
- b. What is our joy? What gives us true happiness and satisfaction?
- c. What is our crown of rejoicing? What provides the highest degree of joy in our lives?

-- Is our answer the same as Paul's? Should it be?

[As we consider what our answer should be, let's examine more closely our text and the answer Paul gave...]

I. PAUL'S HOPE, GLORY, AND JOY

A. WE READ OF HIS DESIRE TO SEE THEM...

1. He had been "*torn away*" from them [2:17]
 - a. He is referring to his necessary departure [Acts 17:10]
 - b. He uses a word that implies a painful bereavement, like a child taken away from his or her parents
2. He had been away from their presence only "*a short time*" [2:17]
 - a. Exactly how long, we do not know
 - b. Probably no more than a year, if not months
3. With "*intense longing*" he made "*every effort to see*" them [2:17]
 - a. Note the repeated emphasis of his longing to see them
 - b. His desire likely heightened by the manner in which he had to leave them

B. WE LEARN WHAT PREVENTED HIM...

1. He wanted to come to them "*again and again*" [2:18]
 - a. Either from Berea or Athens
 - b. But he was hindered
2. It was Satan who hindered him [2:18]
 - a. He attributes the persecution by his fellow Jews to Satan
 - 1) It was the unbelieving Jews who were hounding him
 - 2) They were following him from place to place
 - 3) They were possibly his "thorn in the flesh", "the messenger of Satan" alluded to in another epistle [2 Cor 12:7-10]
 - b. Satan was the ultimate source behind the persecution suffered by the early church and even now 1 Peter 5:8-9 "⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

C. WE DISCOVER PAUL’S HOPE, GLORY, AND JOY...

1. The Thessalonians were Paul’s “*hope*”, because he hoped to see them at the coming of the Lord [2:19]
2. They were his “*joy*” or “*crown in which we [Paul] will glory*”, in anticipation of seeing them in the presence of Jesus [2:19]
3. They were his “*glory*” and “*joy*” - not just in the future, but in the present as well “*you are our glory and joy*” [2:20]

[Paul’s hope, glory, and joy were his brethren in Christ, especially those he had taught and brought to the Lord. Not just the Thessalonians, but others as well

Philippians 4:1 “*Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*”

And it works both ways: At the coming of Christ, Paul would be the source of joy for those he taught the word of God [2 Cor 1:14] Now let’s consider what ought to be...]

II. OUR HOPE, GLORY, AND JOY

A. FOR SOME CHRISTIANS, IT MAY BE...

1. Their possessions
 - a. Their hope is in the acquisition of material things
 - b. Their glory [pride] is in what they have obtained
 - c. Their joy [happiness] is in the pleasure such things give them

-- But such things are perishable and susceptible to theft, they draw us away from God; therefore it is folly to have them as our hope, glory and joy [Matt 6:19-21, 24; 1 John 2:15-17]

2. Their jobs
 - a. Their hope is in the advancement of their careers
 - b. The glory [pride] is in how far they have come
 - c. Their joy [happiness] is in the money, power, or prestige they have obtained

-- But our jobs and all that they bring can be fleeting [especially in today’s job market, with frequent downsizing and lack of company loyalty to employees); they shall one day come to nothing [2 Pet 3:10]

3. Their families
 - a. Their hope is what their families may become
 - b. Their glory [pride] is what their families have become
 - c. Their joy [happiness] is in the relationship they enjoy with their families

-- While certainly more noble [and rewarding] than possessions or jobs, even our families are limited in the joys and glory they can bring; death ends our relationship as family, and if they are not Christians, what does that do for our hope? [Matt 10:37 ; 12:46-50]

B. FOR ALL CHRISTIANS, WHAT IT SHOULD BE...

1. Our hope should be to see each other in heaven!
 - a. To see each other with Jesus in the presence of the Lord at His coming
 - b. What a wonderful occasion, what a glorious reunion!
2. Our glory should be seeing each other in the presence of the Lord!
 - a. Serving the Lord faithfully now
 - b. Being glorified together with Jesus when He comes [2 Thess 1:10-12]

3. Our joy should be the happiness coming from our working together in the Lord!
 - a. The joy experienced by John when he saw others walking in the truth
 - 2 John 4 *“It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”*
 - 3 John 3-4 *“³ It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”*
 - b. The joy Paul experienced when told of the faithfulness of the Thessalonians [1 Thess 3:6-9]
4. Our hope, glory, and joy should be in that which is eternal...
 - a. Otherwise we are setting ourselves up for eventual disappointment
 - b. Our possessions, jobs, even families cannot provide true hope, glory and joy
 - 1) At best, what they offer is temporary
 - 2) At worst, they provide much disappointment, and draw us away from God
5. Since much of our hope, glory, and joy, both now and in eternity, is through our brethren...
 - a. It is important that we nurture and strengthen our relationships
 - b. It is imperative that we seek to bring others to Christ, including those in our physical families

-- Such effort not only brings us closer to each other, but to God, and produces that which lasts for eternity!

And then we shall truly be able to say to each other, *“Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”* Can we say that now...?