

“God’s Word Working” (1 Thessalonians 2:1–16)(8.23.20)

1 Thessalonians 2:1–16 (ESV)

2 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. **2** But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. **3** For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, **4** but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. **5** For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. **6** Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. **8** So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. **10** You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. **11** For you know how, like a father with his children, **12** we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. **14** For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, **15** who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind **16** by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“God’s Word Working”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

To begin, we must notice the context of family in our text. Paul starts here with “you yourselves know, brothers,” which in his day included sisters too. Then we have the relationship of a nursing mother to her beloved children. Certainly, this is as close, nurturing, gentle and loving as you can get. Paul says the he and Timothy and Silas were affectionately desirous of the Thessalonians. They had become very dear children to Paul and the other church planters.

He continues with the brother and sister connection before he reminds them also of their fatherly role as more mature Christians to the baby Christians. In the fatherly role, they exhorted, they encouraged each individual. And, as any good father, they established a pattern for the children to follow, and there is none better: “walk in a manner worthy of God.”

The significant relationship between Paul, Silas, and Timothy with the people was also demonstrated in action. Though it might be expected that the Thessalonians might provide support for them, they labored and toiled, working day and night. You cannot miss the emphasis of the repetition and continuous nature of their efforts. They did not want to be a burden or provide any basis that they were trying to monetize the gospel message – to make a profit from it.

As we looked at last week, Paul, Silas, Timothy modeled Christ to the Thessalonians. Here, Paul established their behavioral standards in layers: holy, righteous, and blameless. In fact, that is the basis by which they charged the Thessalonian believers to live and walk worthy of God, who calls us into his own kingdom and glory. Do not miss that kingdom is a present reality into which every believer is called to live their lives.

BODY:

There is a man I know, about my age, who knows about Jesus, but does not believe in the Jesus of the Bible. Let's call him Max. We have had interesting interactions via email and texting. I believe the Lord is moving in Max's life and the texting we shared on Tuesday night relates directly to today's reading from 1 Thessalonians. Now, everything is not clearly expressed, but that too reveals something of the internal unrest.

Max starts with this, right out of the blue: You're a sinner. And Jesus gave me the job of telling you that you are a sinner. No offense. But I think it's only fair that I tell you. Just for your own protection. Because the back end of that doesn't look good you. Because I'm the messenger. I'm safe. And above you. So as you descend into hell, I'll be watching from above.

We're all sinners. But you're a bigger sinner because Jesus told me to tell you. I had to tell you. So the ranking of sinners is complex but. Just know. I'm above everyone else because. I've actually never sinned. NICE. Unless it was judgement passed to me by some (bleep). Why would anyone do that to another person? To feel superior. Such a great feeling. Peace.

Ten minutes later, before I saw the first text, Max continues: By the way. If a religion is based on passing on the good news that we're all sinners. Except you're a bigger sinner, then Leave me out. Especially if the message is coming from any other ordinary man. Who's trying to position himself above me by giving me that good news. Wow. I was born innocent. Without sin.

After reading those two texts, I could easily have taken offense. I could have presumed that maybe he had been drinking. I might have just ignored it; but, I am pretty sure that I represent Christianity to him and because of that, I am a lightning rod for his existential angst. I want to engage him in such a way that Max might actually be able to hear the gospel.

I texted back: There is no grading on a curve with God. It is all pass/fail. And, we all fail without Jesus. Everyone with Jesus passes based on His merit.

Max: There are degrees among men.

Me: There is no doubt in my mind that I am a sinner. That is why I am so grateful for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, paying the penalty for all my sin.

Max: Don. I love you. But that's a manmade self-inflicted construct aimed at everyone except the author. You of all people should have more self-respect. You didn't do anything wrong.

Me: Well Max, I believe the Bible is God's holy inspired word. It took 25 years of wrestling with it before I became convinced (when I was 45).

Then I continued:

Not coincidentally, this is my key scripture for next Sunday's sermon: 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NIV84): 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.

Then I was surprised by Max's next text: You've been more than patient with me. Thank you for listening. Everything I say is a question. Have a lovely evening.

I closed with: Be blessed!

You can see that the LORD is moving in Max's spirit. As Methodists, we understand that prevenient grace is God already drawing us towards Him before we even become aware. It is my prayer that Max comes to a full understanding of Jesus as He is revealed in our Bibles.

Because you know the title of today's message, "God's Word Working", you are probably not surprised by my key verse. The Thessalonians received the word of God – actively, not passively. More than that, they accepted, they welcomed the word of God. They were able to discern that Paul, Timothy, and Silas were faithful messengers and the gospel they brought was from God Himself.

This is about more than conversion, but certainly includes coming to a saving faith in Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 (NIV84) Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. In the previous chapter, Paul describes this message, this good news,

this gospel as coming in four degrees. It came not only in word, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in conviction or assurance.

Certainly, this is God's word working within the Thessalonians. After conversion, they turned away from idolatrous lives and turned to the true and living God. They were filled with joy and were a model to other believers everywhere. In this chapter, this power through the Holy Spirit empowers them to continue their journey of sanctification. That is how we can proceed in our kingdom walk with God. That walk is to be holy, righteous, and blameless. It is only possible by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit as God's word works in us.

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV84) For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NIV84)

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Romans 12:2 (NIV84) Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That renewing happens through the tandem of the Holy Spirit and God's word working in believers.

"As a liberally educated Oxford lecturer and later Cambridge professor, C. S. Lewis was well aware of the fact that to understand Western culture — let alone culture in general — one ought to know the Bible.

He believed that no other book had such a profound influence on the literature of the world as this one book, for even the Quran instructed its followers to know the Gospels and the Psalms.

Once Lewis came to believe that God exists, even before he became a Christian, he began his lifelong practice of daily Bible reading. For Lewis, Bible reading was as natural to his daily routine as eating or sleeping. From the time of his conversion, the atheist turned Christian most often read passages prescribed in the Anglican prayer book, but his method of reading, study, and meditation varied.

No matter what section of the Bible captured his attention at any given time, this one thing must be said about Lewis: he was a man of the Book. Toward the end of his life Lewis was asked what he thought of the practice of daily devotions. He answered,

We have our New Testament regimental orders upon the subject. I would take it for granted that everyone who becomes a Christian would undertake this practice. It is enjoined upon us by Our Lord; and since they are His commands, I believe in following them. It is always just possible that Jesus Christ meant what He said when He told us to seek the secret place and to close the door.

Lewis faithfully got into the Bible each day, and it is clear from all he wrote that the Bible got into him.

In his writing, Lewis sought to focus on what he called "mere Christianity" — that is, those things most central to Christian faith and teaching, and that which is most central to the Bible. From the Scriptures, all that is essential to faith and practice is drawn. As spiritual questions arise out of the text, Lewis intersected with those questions and developed profound apologetics for the faith, including his well-known commentary on whether Jesus was a "liar, lunatic, or the Son of God."

Lewis wrote, **"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else."** Lewis believed that the Bible does not close the minds of its readers. On the contrary, it opens them up to the presence and wonder of God as He has displayed His glory everywhere.

For example, in reading other books, one's own understanding of Scripture is bound to deepen. As Lewis observed, "There is nothing in literature which does not, in some degree, percolate into life." The questions of the human heart, embedded in the literature of the world, allow us to seek answers in the Scriptures and thus be impressed once again by their enduring wisdom.

John Wesley considered Bible reading and certainly proclaiming God's word as means of grace. In other words, God works through them to change us, to transform us into the image of his Son.

Think of God's word as a pure crystal-clear pool of truth. As you drink of its waters, the impurities within you are neutralized. As you bathe in it, the waste of this world is washed away. It is the still waters that restore your soul. Your reflection in this beautiful pool of life, shows you the reality of who you were, and the soul you are becoming.

As you are nurtured at this pool, you produce the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. You learn to love the LORD with your whole being and your neighbor as yourself. This all is the supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit activating God's holy inspired word within you.

One old-time preacher said, "**Whatever the Divine Word prescribes, that it works in us.** Does it prescribe repentance? — it works repentance; faith? — it works faith; obedience? — it works obedience; knowledge? — it enlightens to know. Its transforming power is continually demonstrated. It makes the stingy generous, the profane holy, the drunkard sober, the profligate chaste. Faith is the vital force that connects the soul with this converting power."

Charles Spurgeon used to print a monthly magazine called "The Sword and the Trowel." Not surprisingly, he chose the name from scripture, Nehemiah 4, where the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt. The people used their trowels for the work on the wall and their swords to defend it.

Spurgeon became quite disturbed over the decline of the Church in England. Even the Baptist Union, of which he was a member, was bringing worldly wisdom of the day into the churches and downgrading the importance of God's word. He and a friend wrote a series of articles for The Sword and the Trowel, which addressed what became known as the Downgrade Controversy:

"What was that "something"? What was the common denominator between all those who started on the down-grade?

The first step astray is a want of adequate faith in the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures. All the while a man bows to the authority of God's Word, he will not entertain any sentiment contrary to its teaching. "To the law and to the testimony," is his appeal concerning every doctrine. He esteems that holy Book, concerning all things, to be right, and therefore he hates every false way. But let a man question, or entertain low views of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and he is without chart to guide him, and without anchor to hold him.

In looking carefully over the history of the times, and the movement of the times, of which we have written briefly, this fact is apparent: that where ministers and Christian churches have held fast to the truth that the Holy Scriptures have been given by God as an authoritative and infallible rule of faith and practice, they have never wandered very seriously out of the right way. But when, on the other hand, reason has been exalted above revelation, and made the exponent of revelation, all kinds of errors and mischiefs have been the result.

Our solemn conviction is that things are much worse in many churches than they seem to be, and are rapidly tending downward. Read those newspapers which represent the Broad School of Dissent, and ask yourself, How much farther could they go? What doctrine remains to be abandoned? What other truth to be the object of contempt? A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese; and this religion, being destitute of moral honesty, palms itself off as the old faith with slight improvements, and on this plea usurps pulpits which were erected for gospel preaching.

My friends, I cannot imagine what Spurgeon would say about the state of the modern western church. Even our own denomination is suffering mightily from this malaise. While on the surface, the issues appear to be same-sex marriage and ordination standards, the underlying and foundational difference is the authority of all scripture.

I read various articles and blogs online dealing with matters of faith. Then I look at the responsive comments. Often, I just shake my head in amazement. This week, one person replied to another, "You shouldn't call yourself a Christian, you should call yourself a "Paulian." Stick to the gospels." Wow! I am afraid that if Paul's letters are not the Holy Word of God, then all of us are hopelessly lost.

CONCLUSION:

A few years ago, I wrote "An Epistle to Emmaus Church." One of the topics addressed was SCRIPTURE: The Bible, God's holy inspired word, is the foundation for ALL that we do at Emmaus. You know that my preaching is saturated with scripture. At Tuesday night's Lord's Supper service, we always read four scriptures. Then we discuss those same scriptures at the Bible study that follows that service. YOU need to be reading your Bible on your own. Every one of us should be studying scripture in a small group. God's word is transformational, and we are told to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We become like Jesus as God the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit. Today, I ask you, "Is God's word working in you?" If you are not attending worship weekly, then you are being fed weakly, w e a k l y. If you are not reading and studying your Bible, then you are disarming the Holy Spirit in your personal faith journey. In a few weeks, we will resume our weekly Tuesday Bible Study. I encourage you to give the Holy Spirit the building blocks, God's word, needed to complete His good work in you. Read through the Bible with us and pray scripture with us on the Emmaus Faithlife group.

Psalm 19:7–9 (NIV84)

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.

The ordinances of the Lord are sure
and altogether righteous.

Is God's word working in you?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.