

RECEIVING THE GOSPEL

Friday, October 17

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

1 Thessalonians 2:13 *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.*

Paul was thankful that the Thessalonians had received the gospel not as the ideas of men but for what it really was – the Word of God. This proved their faith was genuine. In fact, the gospel message is not something people would invent if they could. It is the opposite of human reason and desire. People want to work and earn their salvation. The gospel declares that the only way of salvation is through faith in Christ alone, apart from works! This acceptance of the gospel as the Word of God had continuing results. The word “believe” is in the present tense indicating something that is ongoing in their lives. It is through His Word that God continues to transform and cleanse His people.

The second thing that proved their faith was genuine was that persecution had not deterred them from following Christ. They had experienced the same suffering that the church in Judea had endured and was still enduring. The early chapters of the book of Acts detail the opposition and attacks of the Jewish people against the young church. When Paul speaks of the Jews, he is not referring to the entire Jewish nation. He is singling out the religious leaders and those who, like them, rejected Jesus as their Messiah. The Jews had a long history of missing the true Word of God. They had killed many of the prophets who had prophesied the coming of Christ and they themselves had conspired to crucify Him when He came. Paul had experienced the hatred of the Jews both in Judea and in almost every city he had visited on his journeys (including Thessalonica!). Just like the Jewish church had suffered at the hands of fellow Jews, so the Thessalonians had suffered at the hands of their fellow countrymen.

Paul describes five truths about these unbelieving Jews (and most would apply to their Gentile persecutors as well).

(1) They Were Holding a Wrong Belief – Not only had the Jewish leaders killed their Messiah, they thought they were serving God by persecuting the church. Paul himself had thought this when he attacked the church before his conversion (cf. Acts 22:3-5). But their actions actually “displeased God.

(2) They Were Hostile – They opposed anyone who did not believe exactly like they did. The Jews of Paul’s day sought to make converts among the Gentiles, but only if they first become a Jew with all the rituals and requirements that involved. The unbelieving Jews resented the gospel’s message that people could come to God without having to go through the Jewish nation. They were hostile to any message that declared other people as equal to them – “God’s chosen people!”

(3) They Were a Hindrance – The reason the Jews attacked Paul so often was that they did not want anyone to believe his message and come to God through Christ. This was the same attitude Jesus condemned in the scribes and Pharisees when He was on earth (see Matthew 23:13; Luke 11:52).

(4) They Were Heaping Up Their Sins – God is patient but the time comes when people’s sin reaches the limit and judgment must fall.

(5) They Were Headed for Judgment – For those who harden their heart, refuse to repent, and actually fight against the gospel, God’s wrath is unavoidable.

What evidence is there in your life to prove your faith is genuine? How do you respond when others criticize or attack you for your faith?