

## The Working of God's Word

### 1 Thessalonians 2:13—18

Paul had been with the Thessalonians for only three Sabbaths and during this time he was able to lead many away from their pagan idols to the God who saved Paul out of his Pharisaical self-righteousness. Paul's biggest concern was that they now walk in a worthy manner, conforming to their position in Christ.

#### **The Power of God's word** (verse 13)

Even though Paul presented the Gospel of Grace to the Thessalonians, they received it as the literal word of God. They knew these words spoken by the Apostle Paul were not words of men but of God. Paul even claims this when he says the Gospel he preached did not come from man but was given to him directly from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11—12). The words we read in Scripture are the very words of God. Just think of how precious they should be to us knowing it is God speaking directly to us as we read our Bible. It's interesting that most people think praying is the most important thing a Christian can do. It seems strange that most people think it's more important to talk to God than having God speak to them through His word. While both activities are important, I believe it is more important to allow God to speak to us through his word. We will never know what God expects of us if we spend our entire life in prayer.

The Thessalonians experienced the power of God's word. It was when they heard and accepted Paul's preaching that they experienced it working in their lives. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's word is living and active. God's word has the power to change a person from the inside out (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18). This is what the Thessalonians experienced first hand, just as we who are believers have experienced.

#### **Judeaizer hatemongers** (verses 14—16)

The religious leaders in Jerusalem, and other cities, were sending people out to stop the spread of Christianity, the same people who killed the prophets and demanded that Jesus be put to death. Saul (now the Apostle Paul) was commissioned to stamp out those who believed in Jesus Christ as Messiah (Galatians 1:13—14). Members of the Hebrew assembly (church), Kingdom believers, were scattered out of Jerusalem because of the intense persecution (Acts 8:1).

This persecution continued after Saul was saved and the assembly of believers in Thessalonica experienced this same maltreatment. Just as the leaders of Israel sent out people to stop the spread of the preaching of Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel, they were now continuing to do the same against the Body of Christ. This persecution came by the hands of their own countrymen, perhaps their own neighbors. Paul says these men were hostile toward all men because they were keeping the Gospel from being heard and thus not giving people the opportunity to become saved. This, according to Paul, filled up or completed the full measure of their sins. They have become as bad as they could possibly be, causing eternal damnation to those who were not able to hear the truth of the Gospel. It is because of this that God's wrath IS (present tense, continuous action) upon them. As Romans 1:18 says "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" To determine how God's wrath is now being revealed, it will help to go back to verse 17 to see that God's righteousness is also being revealed right now. I believe this righteousness comes in the form of the Gospel of Christ (Verse 16). The presentation of the Gospel reveals God's righteousness.

In the same way, God has revealed what will happen to those who reject this offer of eternal life. They will suffer in the everlasting lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). His wrath has been revealed just as His righteousness has been. God's wrath has not only been revealed to those opposing Paul, but God's wrath is upon them. Not a good position to be in.

### **Satan's attack** (verses 17—18)

Satan was attacking Paul at every turn. In this case it was Paul's desire to go back to visit with the Thessalonians to check up on their spiritual growth but Satan thwarted him. While Paul was writing his first letter to the Thessalonians, he was probably in Corinth. It was in Corinth where he had to deal with a grievous sin within the congregation and great adversity from the Jews. These things were hindrances from Satan, preventing him from seeing the Thessalonians.

This statement, I believe, begs the question of how did Paul know this came from Satan? Could the Lord have been the One to keep him in Corinth by orchestrating some of these circumstances to make it impossible for him to leave? This idea can be supported by Acts 18:9—10 when the Lord came to Paul and said He would protect him so he shouldn't stop boldly speaking. It sounds like God desired Paul to stay in the city of Corinth and continue to preach the Gospel.

This brings to mind another incident that Paul had that he attributed to the Lord's leading. As Paul was in Troas (at the western tip of modern-day Turkey) he had determined to go east across the northern coast of Turkey until he had a vision of a man from Macedonia imploring him to come to the region north of modern day Greece. Paul understood this to be a message from God and immediately did as the vision directed him. Again, How did Paul know this was from God and not misdirection from Satan?

Another example given to us by Paul comes from 2 Corinthians 2:12—13. Here he says He had a door of opportunity to preach in Troas but ignored the open door and apparently opened a window to go into Macedonia to find Titus. He did this because he had no peace to stay in Troas. Did Paul ignore God's leading to take advantage of an open door or was it correct of Paul to move on because he had no peace about staying?

Is it possible to learn how to discern God's will for our lives from these examples? Are we to look for open doors, peace, visions or dreams, or external circumstances to be our guide in knowing what God wants us to do? I believe Paul was a special example that is not the norm for today. Before the completion of Scripture God verbally communicated with mankind letting them know what He desired. Now that Scripture is completed there is no further need for God to communicate verbally with us individually. Notice that in every instance in Scripture when God communicated with anyone it was direct communication with no ability to misinterpret what was being said. Today we have all that God wanted to say to us in Scripture (2 Corinthians 12:8—12). This change happened before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. as evidenced by Paul being unable to heal his friends (Philippians 2:25—30; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20). We also see a change in water baptism when Paul reports that he no longer has a ministry of baptizing (1 Corinthians 1:17). This was written shortly after he did baptize some in Corinth. These changes coincide with the decline of God speaking directly to His prophets and with the completion of the Bible.

### **God's will for me**

Many, if not most, Christians determine God's will for their lives by reading signs and circumstances, setting out "fleeces," waiting for a sense of peace, following open or closed doors or even interpreting certain dreams. All these methods have one common thread; that of expecting extra-biblical revelation to be given to them in determining what God wants them to do. Even Christians who are adamant that Scripture is complete and closed will buy into this system of God speaking outside of Scripture.

I believe Scripture does tell each believer what God's will is for his or her life. His will is wrapped up in the doctrine God gave us in Paul's 13 epistles. After we are filled with the knowledge of His will, by studying these 13 books, we will know how to walk in a proper manner (Colossians 1:9). You will stay in God's will by walking in a manner worthy of your salvation.

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