

THE CHURCH WHERE GOD IS AT WORK
1 Thess. 2:13

Intro: I thought that I might give my message a subject like this: THE CHURCH THAT GOD BLESSES, or, THE CHURCH THAT GOD USES. But the more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that titles like that put the emphasis in the wrong place.

As you read through 1 Thessalonians, you certainly do not get the impression that Paul is taking credit for what had happened there, nor is he giving the Thessalonians the credit for what had taken place. All of the glory is given TO GOD! And so it is not so much that he or they had laid the foundation and God had added the blessing, but it is evident that God has been at work from the very beginning.

Thus, our text begins with a note of praise -- continual praise: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing."

Thus GOD received the praise -- not just once -- but over and over and over again! They could not stop praising Him for what He had done!

What, actually, had happened, which was the cause of such praise to God?

Three things:

- 1) They had accepted the Word of God.
- 2) They had accepted it as the Word of God, and not as the word of men.
- 3) They had seen the effectual work of the Word in their lives.

Let us look at each of these points contained in our text.

I. THEY HAD ACCEPTED THE WORD OF GOD.

This is the equivalent of saying that they had received the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. They believed the Gospel.

Now we could look at this from the divine standpoint and go back to verse 4 of chapter 1 where Paul says that what had happened had proved their "election of God," but I pass over that tonight just recognizing the fact that it is there.

BUT WHAT I DO WANT YOU TO SEE IS THE EMPHASIS THAT PAUL MAKES IN 1 THESS. 1:5, and also in 1 THESS. 2:4-8.

And this is the reason that Paul gives God the glory for their acceptance of the Gospel -- because God is the only one who could have made Paul and his co-workers see that there is this special factor in the preaching of the Gospel which to a great extent determines its effectiveness. The

witness must be a holy person, his motives must center in the glory of God and in the blessing of the people to whom he goes, and his methods must be above reproach.

Paul is giving the Lord the glory:

- 1) That the Lord had made him understand this, and
- 2) That the Lord had made him that kind of a witness.

II. THEY HAD ACCEPTED THE WORD OF GOD AS THE WORD OF GOD, AND NOT AS THE WORD OF MEN.

What does it mean that they had received the message as the Word of God, and not as the word of men? Is there a danger that some of us have never really seen that the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God?

Here are certainly some of the distinctive features in such an acceptance of the Word:

- 1) If it is the Word of God, it must be TRUE. And so there would be no room for argument.
- 2) If it is the Word of God, it has to be IMPORTANT -- more important than any message of man possibly could be.
- 3) If it is the Word of God, it is unique. There is not other message like it.
- 4) If it is the Word of God, it will not change. It will always be the same.
- 5) If it is the Word of God, it will be effective.

So it was not a miracle just that it was accepted, but it was an occasion for praise to God that the Thessalonians who believed had had the Word of God lifted in their minds completely above and beyond anything that they had heard before.

God gets the glory for this because only He could have done it!

But there is one more point:

III. THEY HAD SEEN THE EFFECTUAL WORK OF THE LORD IN THEIR LIVES.

Paul calls it "the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" -- and it does!

Note what had happened according to 1 Thess. 1:6-8.

And Paul refers to this briefly again in the verses which follow our text: 1 Thess. 2:14 ff.

Taking the two passages above we have five significant things -- all of which seem to have taken effect as a result of the Word of God being accepted as the Word of God. Note what they were:

- 1) They began to live like the Apostle and Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:6a).
- 2) They suffered, but they were not turned back by the suffering (1 Thess. 1:6m; 2:14 ff.).
- 3) They had a joy they had never known before -- the "joy of the Holy Spirit." Cf. 1 Thess. 1:6b.
- 4) Their lives became examples for other believers to follow. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:7.
- 5) Finally, they began to publish the Word of God with such enthusiasm and accuracy that when Paul went to Macedonia and Achaia and every other place where their witness was taken, it was not necessary for him to make any changes at all. See 1 Thess. 1:8.

Concl: When we look at the amazing things which took place in Thessalonica, we see that God had indeed done a great work -- a work which Paul nor the Thessalonians could ever have done.

When we look at our ministry today and the possibility that the Lord might do something similar to us, the question is not one of methods, or equipment, or money -- things which seem to be so important to us today. The question is this: HOW HAVE YOU AND I ACCEPTED THE WORD OF GOD -- AS THE WORD OF GOD, OR AS THE WORD OF MEN?

Do you accept this Word -- even when you cannot understand it?

Do you obey it? Are you as anxious to live like Paul lived as the Thessalonians were?

Do you believe that God still works effectually through His Word -- and only through His Word.

One cannot help but come to the conclusion that the reason we are not seeing greater evidence of the blessing of God is because we do not accept the Word of God the way they did in Thessalonica!

Let us pray that God will strengthen our faith in the Word and through the Word . . .

- that we will accept it all as true,
- that it will become more important to us than anything else that we ever read,
- that we will see that there is no other word like it, that the Bible stands alone as the Word of God,
- that we will begin to trust God to work through His Word to make us what He wants us to be, and to accomplish through us what He wants to do,
- and that we will be willing to stand for this Word regardless of the opposition we may have to face, either from outside of the church, or within.