

2 Thessalonians 2: 13; "The Word of God which is Effectual", Sermon # 10 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 18th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

What is the difference between the Word of God, the Bible, and all other books? It is, very simply, that it is God's Word and not man's. It is not as though men were not involved in the writing of it. They most certainly were. It is not as though men could not speak it or preach it before it was written down. They did. The significant and all-important difference is that men were not the source of these words; God was the Source and Originator of them. Many people down through time have evidently considered this a great blunder, on God's part, because they reason that if God cannot or will not speak to them directly and audibly, then it follows that they should not receive the words spoken or written by men as being God's words. Men, they know, are not infallible, as God is infallible. And so, they reason, if men have written down words and called them God's Word, certainly it cannot be so. It is not as though this has not happened down through time. This is why other religions of the World have their Koran, their Vedas, their Book of Mormon and etc. But the real problem with men receiving the Bible as the Word of God is the sin of unbelief, and a refusal to submit to the words which some men say cannot be proven to be God's Word.

I believe that there is plenty enough evidence in the Bible itself to prove that it is the Word of God. But I also know that God has designed His Word to be believed and received by faith. And I know that it is a sin against God not to believe it. Because when people cannot believe that God can preserve entire and intact the words that he has spoken, by having them written down by fallible men; they really are not believing in God's way of doing things. To believe in God, you must believe in His way of doing things. Believing in God's ways and means is just as important as believing in God Himself, for if you do not do so, you will disqualify the very way that God speaks to you. And what is worse, you will perish in your sins. I know that I sound like a little child when I say these things, but you must remember that Jesus said that unless you receive the kingdom of God as a little child you shall by no means enter it. But I would rather play the little child and enter the kingdom than miss out on it. On the Day of Judgment the Lord will easily find men guilty of this sin by saying to them, "This was child's play; to enter the kingdom, but you would not have My way of entering." The only reason that it is hard to enter the Kingdom of God is because men want to make it harder than it is by not believing in God's way of revealing Himself; His Word and His ways.

Paul and his co-workers in the gospel thanked God without ceasing for the response of the Thessalonian believers to their preaching to them the gospel. They were thankful for three reasons which are reasons which will help you and I to be saved, if we are not saved, and to grow up into Christ which is God's purpose in saving us. They gave thanks 1st of all that the believers there "received the Word

of God". They gave thanks, 2nd, that they welcomed it not as the word of men, but as the Word of God. And third- they gave thanks that the Word was effectively working in those who believed. We will look at each of these reasons for the Apostle's thankfulness to think more about God's way of speaking to men.

1st of all- Paul gives thanks that the believers "received the Word of God."

The Word of God is designed by God to be received by men. It had to be received by the prophet or the messenger before it could be delivered to other hearers. Once the prophet or the messenger receives it, then he conveys the message and it is meant to be received. We could preach a whole sermon on this one point alone. The Word of God is conveyed by God to human instruments who receive it; fallible, weak, and sometimes even sinful men. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." He is saying that people ought not to be overly impressed with us; they ought to be impressed with the power, the mercy, and the wisdom of God that He would choose this way of speaking. In order to receive the message, and be saved or taught, you have to receive the messenger. The Apostles and first believers in Christ during the days of His earthly ministry had to receive Him to receive the message. John 1: 11, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (or the power) to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." By His word, He taught the people the way of salvation. When God's Spirit was at work in a person's heart, they would receive these words that He spoke. Turn to Mark 4: 20. Here Jesus was teaching the people in parables. This is the parable of the sower and the soils. The One sowing the seed is Jesus Himself, or any preacher of the Word called by God to do so. There are 4 different types of soil which represent different ways that people receive the Word of God. Only one type of heart is a good heart. It is the last one. Verse 20 says, "But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, (the margin says, "receive it") and bear fruit: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred." You should ask yourself this afternoon; do I receive the Word of God into my heart when I hear it preached? Does it bear fruit in my life? Or am I lazy and casual about the Word of God, not receiving it in order to believe it or do it? This is a very important question to God, not just to the preacher.

Turn to John 17 and you will see why it is so important. Jesus is about to go to the cross, to die for all the Elect, and He is praying for them here. Notice what He prays for those who believe in Him in verse 7. "Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You." "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me." "I pray for them, I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." You see how important it was to Jesus that these disciples of

His had received His words. Their receiving of Jesus and His words brought to them salvation, and also then, the ability to have Jesus glorified in them. This is what it does for us today as well. Here Jesus is praying not only for the Apostles and disciples of that day, but also for us who are alive here upon the earth today. Verse 20 says, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word." You see, this includes us, who also receive the words which we find in the Bible, in order to be saved and to learn to do all that Christ has commanded us. Do you have this holy mindset as you sit listening to me this afternoon? Is the word of God making progress in your soul? Is it of profit to you? That is, is your soul prospering to grow strong in grace by the way that you listen to it? Take care how you listen and receive it. For it will only do you good if you are receiving it as God's Word to you. It is light, it is food, it is honey, it is riches, it spiritual life to you. Receive it as such and it will do you great good.

2nd- Paul gives thanks that the Thessalonian believers welcomed this word, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God.

When you think of some of the human instruments that convey the Word of God to men they are often not too impressive. But God can make the simplest and the weakest most impressive when He chooses to do so. It is not the man but the message conveyed in His power, that God chooses to use to accomplish His many and complex purposes. We, by faith, must try to hear the voice of God speaking to us through the messenger. Sometimes the Lord has to speak to the messenger himself in a radical way before he can effectually speak to others God's word in the way that He wants it conveyed. He wants no compromise to made. His is not the word of men. You will find that there are many men who were weak and insufficient in themselves to speak the word of God, and some even positively sinful. I am thinking about the false prophet Balaam. God is not limited to a certain category of people by whom He speaks by. He can even speak through the most dumb and stubborn of creatures. In speaking about false prophets in 2nd Peter 3: 15, Peter says, "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet." But God knows what kind of men, or in this case, animals, that He should use to speak to a sinful and disobedient prophet with. Turn with me to Numbers 22. The elders of Moab and Midian did not like the children of Israel traveling though their land. They wanted the prophet Balaam to curse these unwanted visitors for them. They came with diviner's fees in their hands to give to him so that he would do so. But God said to Balaam in verse 12, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." Balaam received this word, but he did not act consistent with it. He felt the force of what sinful men wanted him to do. They wanted him to curse Israel, but God intended to bless them.

Look how Balaam compromised in receiving the word of God. Verse 13 says, "So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, 'Go back to your

land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you." "And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, 'Balaam refuses to go with us.'" "Then Balak again sent princes more numerous and more honorable than they." "And they came to Balaam and said to him, 'Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me.'" "Therefore, please come, curse this people for me." Now you can see from this the word of men being set up in competition in Balaam's mind, with the word of God. He is hard pressed when he ought not to be. He feels the pressure to receive the "thus says Balak the son of Zippor" as though his word was on the same level as the word of God. He resists this impulse at first as we see in verse 18. "Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.'" "Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me." Notice please, that God had already told Balaam that he should not go with them, and he should not curse Israel for them, but he is willing to compromise; to check it out again with God as though God was man that He might change His mind. No, God is utterly and completely faithful to His word. Balaam had to learn this lesson the hard way. Will this be the case with some of you my listeners here today? When God says that He loves Israel and would not have any of them cursed, was it because all of the children of Israel were holy persons and righteous? No, but they were His covenant people. He will be faithful to all of them, not just some of them. He will certainly love all of His Elect and require us to do so as well. This is all who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. He knows them. He will do them good. We must do the same with all those whom we have reason to believe are true Christians or we are not receiving the word of God with a true heart. The Lord chose to speak to Balaam through the mouth of a donkey. Why? Because we usually think of the donkey as a stubborn resistant creature. But here we find that Balaam was the stubborn, resistant creature. He was not receiving the word of God as the word of God but as the word of man. "God is not a man that He should lie, or a son of man that He should repent." "Has He said, and will He not do?" "Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23: 19 and 20) This is what Balaam eventually came to say in regard to God after a donkey spoke to him and rebuked him for his folly.

You probably remember the story. God realized that Balaam was willing to compromise His word to him and so he pretended to allow Balaam to go Balak's representatives. But in verse 22 it says, "Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him." "And he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him." "Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field." "So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road." "Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this

side and a wall on that side." "And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again." "Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in the narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left." "And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff." "Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?' "And Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have abused me.' "I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!" "So the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day?' "Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" "and he said, 'No.'" "Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face." You can see now I think why we need to try to look beyond the messenger of the Word of God to the Angel of the Lord who is standing behind him. It does not matter whether it is a donkey or a preacher. If God chooses to use the one or the other, it is His sovereign choice. The real question is will we see Him? Will we listen to Him? Or is our way perverse before Him? We must receive the Word of God, not as the word of men which changes or vacillates depending upon the situation that we are in. We see God in the gospel as faithful. We see God in His Word which speaks to us, as utterly faithful to thank word. Faithful to save. Faithful to keep. Faithful to convict us of our sin when we need it. Faithful to bring us into line so that we will not have a false Christianity, but a true faith. Faithful to give us grace to change and become faithful followers of Him who loved us and died for us. Faithful to give us abounding grace to keep us in temptations and stand against the onslaught of evil men and the devil. This is what the believers at Thessalonica understood in truth.

Then 3rd and last - Paul gives thanks for the effectual working of the Word in these Thessalonian believers.

They received the Word of God for what it really was in truth; "the Word which effectively (or effectually) worked in them who believed." And it is the same for us today as it was for them then. Paul gives thanks for this because He knows that ultimately the faith of these believers doesn't rest upon Him and his words and example as a man of God, important as his words and example were. The Word of God which He preached to them was accompanied by the Almighty power of God so that it became effectual. Are you not thankful that it is so? I like that old fashioned word "effectual". The word "effective" is good as well. The word effective means, "producing the intended or expected result." The word effectual means to bring to pass, to achieve, to effect." This is what God's powerful grace actually does in the heart and the life of the believer in Jesus Christ our Lord. Ours is not a maybe salvation. The power and purpose of God cannot be thwarted in the life of the one trusting in Him. He who has begun a good work in you will

see it through to completion. "Faithful is He who calls you, and He will bring it to pass." (1 Thessalonians 5: 24) But we must remember our responsibility. Our responsibility as believers is to continue to receive God's Word to us on a daily basis. Our responsibility to receive God's Word to us when it is preached on Sundays, to eagerly receive it, and ponder it, and digest it, and pray that it will be translated into living in such ways that all that we do and say will please God and bring Him glory.