

Life Changing Power

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 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!

INTRODUCTION

A lot of people are confused about what the Bible teaches. Here are some humorous answers to a Bible quiz given to middle school students.

1. Noah's wife was Joan of Ark.
2. Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the 10 Commandments.
3. The seventh commandment is, "Thou shalt not admit adultery."
4. Joshua fought the battle of Geritol.
5. The followers of Jesus were called the 12 decibels.
6. David killed Galahad, who was one of the Finkelsteins.
7. A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony.

The Apostle Paul had preached only three weeks in Thessalonica before he was run out of town by an angry mob.

But he left behind a group of believers who formed a church.

He wrote them this letter to encourage them in the face of opposition.

Our nation is losing its moral compass because many of our leaders no longer consider the Bible to be a reliable guide for truth.

In 2005, the state supreme court in Colorado overturned a death penalty on a convicted murderer because the jurors consulted a Bible while deliberating over the sentence.

The court ruled “the Bible constituted an improper outside influence.”

But I agree with American statesman, Daniel Webster, who wrote: “If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering; but if we and our posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity.”

Let’s consider three truths about the Word of God.

I. THE WORD OF GOD CAME THROUGH ORDINARY PEOPLE

Paul referred to his preaching to them when he wrote, ***“You accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)***

Paul had the audacity to say that the gospel of Jesus Christ wasn’t just a story from his imagination, but it was the Word of God.

And as we’re reading his words two thousand years later, we still consider it to be the Word of God.

The thing that makes the Bible totally unique is that it was written over a period of 1,500 years by forty different people, in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).

These were ordinary people who were inspired by the extraordinary Spirit of God.

Peter wrote, ***“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)***



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Is the Bible unique?

As Christians, we don't ascribe to any kind of holy dictation theory.

God spoke through all different kinds of ordinary people.

Moses was a prince of Egypt writing in the wilderness.

Daniel was a prime minister writing from a palace in Iraq.

Paul was a prisoner writing from behind bars.

Amos was a farmer; Peter was a fisherman; Solomon was a king; Luke was a doctor, and Matthew worked for the IRS!

God spoke in different ways to different people.

He thundered His message to Moses.

To Jeremiah, God's Word was like a fire in his bones.

To Elijah, God spoke in a still small voice.

God spoke to Daniel through dreams and visions.

The Bible is written for all people.

It is the world's best-selling book.

The full Bible has been translated into 518 languages.

Portions of the New Testament have been translated into 2,798 languages.

That number was good last week; it keeps changing, because almost every week, it is translated into a new language.

The fact that the Bible was written down by all these ordinary people convinces me it is truly the Word of God.

These forty men who wrote the Bible lived in different times, different cultures, and wrote in different languages, and yet the Bible has a common theme.

God's Word is communicated through ordinary people, who were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Some people claim the Bible is just a collection of old myths and fables.

Others call it the "good book" but they don't consider it to be "God's Book."

But for those of us who have studied it for decades, we believe it is the Word of God.

II. THE WORD OF GOD IS AT WORK IN US

Paul went on to write, ***"The word of God, which is at work in you who believe."***
(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

When you are thirsty, you can drink water, and that water starts to work in you to relieve your thirst.

When you are hungry, you can eat food, and that food works in you to give you nourishment and strength.

When you breathe in, oxygen goes into your lungs, and it works in you to give you energy.

Without water, food, or oxygen, we would soon die.

The Word of God is even more important.

Jesus told Satan, ***"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."*** (Matthew 4:4 NKJV)

The Bible is like living water that quenches your spiritual thirst.

It is like bread that nourishes your soul.

It is like life-giving oxygen as God inspires you.

The Bible says, ***"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. Nothing in all***



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creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

Since this is God's Word, we should be careful not to criticize the author.

To what extent is God's Word at work in your life?

III. THE WORD OF GOD PRODUCES OPPOSITION

Paul wrote, ***"You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews." (1 Thessalonians 2:14)***

Paul faced hostility and opposition in every city where he preached.

Paul referred to the Jewish troublemakers who had driven him out of town and were now opposing the believers in Thessalonica.

He writes that the Jewish people killed God's prophets, and even killed the Son of God.

Paul himself, had been one of those who opposed Christians.

Paul approved of the death of Stephen and even cared for the coats of the men who stoned him to death.

When you believe the Word of God, you're going to face opposition. Why? Let me give you three reasons.

A. The Gospel exposes the ugliness of sin

The Bible teaches that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. We are all sinners. Jeremiah wrote, ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV)***

If you listen to the news, and what do you read?

Violence, wickedness, and cover-ups.

However, the problem in America is the problem of sin.



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There are social evolutionists who claim humanity is getting better and better.

Education and technology are going to move us to a place of human utopia and goodness.

It's not happening.

We're seeing more and more hideous and horrific acts carried out by people.

I've got bad news and I've got good news.

The bad news is that ***"the wages of sin is death."*** But the good news is ***"the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 6:23)

B. The Gospel forgives undeserving sinners

The Gospel announces that there is salvation for anyone who comes to Christ, regardless of how bad they've been.

A pastor friend of mine was talking to a prison social worker once.

The social worker wasn't a believer, and he had a problem with Christian groups coming into the prison and preaching salvation.

The social worker said, "Do you mean to tell me that a convicted murderer or rapist here in prison who comes to Christ can be forgiven and be just as accepted by God as someone, like me who has lived a good, honest life?"

The pastor said, "Yes."

The prison worker said, "Well, then I don't want anything to do with the Bible."

That's the scandal of grace.

I'm happy to report that the social worker later became a believer and a leader in his church.

C. The Gospel predicts punishment for sin



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Another reason people don't like the Bible is that it is clear in its message that God will one day punish sin.

That's unpopular.

Paul wrote this about the Jews who were opposing the gospel: ***"In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."*** (1 Thessalonians 2:16)

A few days before He was crucified, Jesus wept over Jerusalem and predicted its destruction because they had not recognized Him as God in the flesh.

In 70 A.D. the Romans attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the city.

Paul wrote this letter a few years before it happened, but even when he wrote this letter, the Jews were already in war against the Romans.

Paul saw this as God's punishment on the city for rejecting Jesus and opposing the gospel.

Most people don't like to hear about hell, which is God's ultimate punishment for sin.

I've been praying for God to send us a Spiritual Awakening in America.

I've studied the previous spiritual awakenings in our nation and I want to talk about the First Great Spiritual Awakening.

It happened in 1730, when there were just thirteen British Colonies.

One of the pastors God has used to spiritually revive the people in New England was Jonathan Edwards.

He preached a famous sermon called, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

Jonathan Edwards wasn't some backwoods bumpkin.

He was a highly educated theologian.



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He had graduated from Yale, and married the daughter of the first President of Yale.

Yale, Harvard, and Princeton were all founded to train preachers.

Jonathan Edwards was the President of Princeton when he died at age 55.

Maybe we need to hear sermons like his if we're going to see a spiritual awakening.

Here's an excerpt from his message:

“The bow of God’s wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.

Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again are in the hands of an angry God.”

It is nothing but God’s hand of mercy that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell last night. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God’s hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.”

Jonathan Edwards wasn't a hell-fire and brimstone preacher yelling and pounding the pulpit.

He read his messages in a high-pitched voice with no emotion.

And yet there are reports of people in the congregation weeping and holding onto the pews and posts of the church building to keep from falling into hell.

He proclaimed God's punishment for sin, but he also offered God's invitation for salvation.

He concluded his message with these words:

“And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands in calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood.”

CONCLUSION

The Word of God has supernatural power to change lives.

In 1949 the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, appointed a Texas pastor by the name of Dr. Julius Hickerson to serve as a missionary in Colombia.

His specific task was to build a seminary in Cali to train Columbian pastors to share the gospel and start churches.

However, before he could ever build the seminary, Dr. Hickerson died in a small plane crash over the remote jungles of the mountains between Colombia and Venezuela.

Two years later, a delegation of natives from the interior came to the Baptist Mission station in Barranquilla.

These natives announced to the missionaries that they were followers of Jesus.

The missionaries were surprised because they hadn't sent missionaries into those remote areas.

They asked how the natives heard the gospel.

The new believers explained that they had found a “book that came from heaven.”

It was a leather-bound New Testament written in Spanish with the name “Julius Hickerson” engraved on the cover.

Only one member of the tribe could read Spanish, so he read it in several villages.

Everyone in these villages became Christians and several churches had been started using nothing more than the model in this book from heaven.

Julius Hickerson died in a plane crash before he could build the seminary, but his Bible survived.

These Columbian natives read it and gave their lives to Christ.

That's the life-changing power of the Word of God!

OUTLINE

I. THE WORD OF GOD COMES THROUGH ORDINARY PEOPLE

“You accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

II. THE WORD OF GOD IS AT WORK IN US

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“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. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” Hebrews 4:12-13

III. THE WORD OF GOD PRODUCES OPPOSITION

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The Gospel



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A. Exposes the ugliness of sin

B. Forgives undeserving sinners

C. Predicts punishment for sin

“In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.” 1 Thessalonians 2:16