

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
The Impact of Responding to the Word of God
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My first pastorate after finishing seminary was not a good experience. After 15 months I had had enough and walked away. For many years I looked at that period of time as a total waste.

Then, one day probably twenty years later we received a letter in the mail from a young lady from a broken home who had been in junior high when we were there. She expressed how we had ministered to her and was expressing her thanks for our concern for her and telling us that she was now a pastor's wife and mother. That letter meant so very much to us.

We know how important our response to the Word of God is for us personally. Our response of faith to the message of the Gospel delivers us from the penalty of sin and gives us eternal life.

As believers as we respond to the Word of God it transforms us step by step so that we increasingly reflect the character of Jesus, so that we might live the kind of life that is worthy of the God who has called us into his eternal kingdom and glory. We also know from Scripture that our response has an impact on God himself. When we respond to the Word of God through the prompting of the Spirit God is pleased [Colossians 1:10, Heb. 13:21]; when we fail to do so he is grieved. I would like to suggest that our text shows us another important impact that a positive response to the Word of God has.

Our response to God's Word blesses those who share God's truth with us.

Before we see how the response of the Thessalonians impacted Paul let's set our text in its context. I believe 1:3 controls the progression of Paul's thought in this letter. In chapters 1-3 Paul reflects on how the Thessalonians had come to faith. At the end of chapter three and the first twelve verses of chapter 4 love seems to be his focus. And the thrust of the rest of chapter 4 and chapter 5 are on our future hope. In 1 Thessalonians 2 & 3 Paul is reviewing the events which had taken place from his initial contact with the Thessalonians until the present time when he was writing this letter. In 2:1-12 he looks back on his conduct and work to bring them the gospel. In 2:13-16 he recounts their response to the gospel. 2:17-3:5 looks at the interim between the time Paul and his team left Thessalonica and the return of Timothy back to Paul. Paul had sent Timothy back to the city to see how things were going there. Then, 3:6-13 talks about his present feelings and desires as he is writing this letter. Timothy's report had relieved his concerns about how they were handling the opposition.

So, back to the details of our text. In these verses I see five ways our positive response to the Word of God blesses those who minister God's Word to us.

1. When we positively respond to the Word of God it gives those who minister to us an opportunity for giving thanks. [13-16]

Think about this for a moment. This morning on the edge of Plainview, Minnesota are gathered together a number of people. We have all listened to the message of the gospel. Most of us have accepted it as true and placed our trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Isn't that something to be thankful for? There are many towns in Minnesota which have no church which clearly proclaims the gospel. But here we

are, sinners saved by the grace of God, whom God allowed to hear the gospel and whose Spirit moved us to accept it. What a reason to be thankful.

And not only that, God isn't done with us when we accept Christ and are born again. He is just beginning his work in us. As we read the Bible, and hear it being taught, it goes to work in us transforming our attitudes, words and actions. This is the clear teaching of the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17. If you know Christ, God's powerful Word is at work in you. It is changing you, making you a better person, reshaping your values and relationships.

Notice something else, the reason Paul could thank God was that their lives showed evidence of God's transforming power, that their response was genuine. They held to the faith in spite of opposition. Paul says the Thessalonian believers became imitators of God's churches in Judea. By imitators Paul means that they followed the example set by the churches in Judea. What Paul particularly had in mind was how they reacted to opposition. Their Christian commitment took root and grew in spite of persecution. Just as the Judean believers were persecuted by the Jews in their homeland, so these Gentile believers in Thessalonica were persecuted by their countrymen, but remained true to Christ.

If you and I respond to the Word of God it gives our pastor, our youth leader, our Sunday School teacher, our life group leader, our Awana leader, our parents, or our Christian friends an opportunity to give thanks to God.

2. When we respond to the Word of God, it is a cause for hope. [17-19]

Paul had only had about three weeks before being forced to leave Thessalonica. He really wanted to spend more time with them. But God permitted Satan to hinder him from returning to Thessalonica. He had concerns about how they were handling the opposition and was anxiously awaiting Timothy's report. Nevertheless here he expresses what they meant to him. Their genuine response to the Word of God was a cause for hope. In the Bible hope is a confident expectation for the future based on the promises of God. What Paul is saying here is that "I have confident expectations of you. I have confidence that my expectations of you won't be disappointed". Now, we might find Paul a little idealistic. "Paul, get real. Don't you know about depravity? Don't you know that God says we shouldn't put our hope in people?" And Paul would say, "Sure, I understand that." Ultimately, our hope is not in people, because people will fail. Our hope is in God. Our hope is what God is doing in the lives of people. Listen to what he said in Philippians 1:6. What will happen if we lose hope for those we are serving? We become cynical or apathetic or we just quit. We can always have hope because God is at work in people Philippians 1:6, the Word of God is at work, [1Thesslonins 2:13], and Jesus is interceding with the Father on their behalf. [John 17:20].

3. When we respond to the Word of God it is reason for joy.

In the Bible joy is a positive disposition or outlook on life. It does not seem to be identical with happiness. Happiness is dependent on our circumstances, but joy is not. What is intriguing is that we can have sorrow and joy at the same time. We can be unhappy about something that has happened in our lives without losing our joy in the Lord. (funeral for a believer) Paul said that the Thessalonian believers inspired joy in his heart. When he saw their faith, their steadfastness, their growth he had joy. As with hope, our joy is connected with God's work in the lives of others whom we serve. [3 John 4]

When you and I respond to the Word of God it brings joy to our spiritual teachers. Can you understand that? Have you experienced that joy? When I pastored a church in Hinckley, Minnesota a couple started coming to church. I visited them and they agreed to have me come and have a Bible study with them. One night they accepted the Gospel. Carol told me that when I came home that night I just glowed. When your son or daughter is baptized. When a friend trust Christ. When one of your Awana kids spiritually thrives into adulthood. These are reasons for joy. A Christian gets joy from seeing what God is doing in the lives of those whom he serves.

4. When we respond to the Word of God it produces eternal rewards [19]

Eternal life is a gift. It is not earned or deserved. You can't get to heaven by being good or going to church, or obeying the Ten Commandments. Ephesians 2:8, 9, Titus 3:5

But there is something that is earned. The Bible says that believers can earn eternal rewards by faithful service and godly living. Among these rewards are ones which are called crowns. The word refers to the leafy crown placed on victors at the Romans games. There are four of these crowns mentioned in the Bible. I don't think we should think of these as literal crowns. A crown represents something. For example, a king's crown represents his authority. The crown of Miss USA is supposed to represent womanly perfection. What is the crown which Paul says he will boast about when Christ returns? It is the Thessalonian believers themselves. There is no thought here of some kind of egotistic prideful boasting. [Romans 15:17, 18] It is all about God's grace and enabling. What Paul is saying that their presence as followers of Christ will make him proud. I picture it as parents at a child's graduation. Or new parents going to introduce Grandma to their new baby.

When you respond to the Word of God, for those who led you to Christ or helped you grow spiritually, you will be a crown of when Jesus returns. Your presence in heaven will be an eternal reward for them. I once published an article in a Christian magazine telling the story of Mary Magdalene seeing the risen Christ. Later I received a letter from the editor telling me of a number of people who wrote back saying they had come to Christ through this article. This was amazing. There may be people in heaven that I have never met who are there in part because God used this article in their lives.

5. When we respond to the Word of God we become the glory of those who shared it with us. [20]

Your spiritual progress will reflect well on their ministry. Just like when a young person grows up to be a responsible adult it reflects well on their parents.

We should never underestimate the impact our response to the Word of God make on others.

This is pastor appreciation month. I don't know what your tradition is for expressing your appreciation for your pastor, but I know this the best way you can encourage Pastor Ty is by responding the Word of God and living in a manner worthy of the God who has called you into his kingdom and glory.