
Taking New Territory in Troubling Times, Pt. 4

The Effective Word

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A radical shift

Years ago, a shift that took place in my life. I had a skeptical curiosity about the Bible — but I didn't believe it or trust it. I wanted to know God — as long as he didn't interfere with my life too much. So, I joined a Bible study in college, didn't own a Bible or read one, but I showed up and started asking all these questions about what sin I could get away with and still be a Christian.

But eventually there was a shift that took place for me. This is a shift that needs to happen for every one of us — if we're going to see the life, the power, the love, the effectiveness of the Word grow in and through our lives with God.

*It's a shift from **curiosity to commitment**. From **skepticism to submission**. From **licentiousness to love**.*

This is exactly what Paul praises the Thessalonian church for in 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you **received the word of God** which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the **word of men**, but as it is in truth, the **word of God**, which also **effectively works in you who believe**.¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans,¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure* of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

In this one verse, there are three profound and practical points of application for every believer. We are to...

RECEIVE THE WORD
BELIEVE THE WORD
OBEY THE WORD

RECEIVE THE WORD

What does it mean to receive the Word?

It is not only reading and hearing — but also consuming, ingesting, and meditating on the Word of God. It's bringing the word of God down into your life — getting the scriptures into your heart and mind.

The first thing Paul tells us about the Thessalonian church is that they received the Word. If you don't first read and receive the Word — it won't do anything for you.

According to a survey taken by Lifeway Research just last year, they discovered that...

- 32% of Americans who attend a Protestant church read the Bible every day
- 27% say they read it a few times a week
- 12% say they only read it once a week
- 11% only read it a few times a month

- 5% once a month
- Close to 1 in 8 (12%) admit they rarely or never read the Bible

**Three quick simple practices that can help us
get into the Word and get the Word into us...
Read it Regularly, Relationally, and Expectantly**

Psalm 119:11,16

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You; I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

- **If the word is going to be *hidden in your heart*, you first have to *put it there*...** and the only way to do that is to receive it.

If you have 30 minutes or an hour to sit down and enjoy a meal (in-depth Bible time) do that — but if you need to grab a pop-tart and run out the door on occasion (quick devotional) — do that. Just don't let your diet of Scripture intake only be pop-tarts — make sure you're getting some good healthy meals and portions. Just because you miss a day in scripture — don't let that keep you from getting in the Word later that day, or spending a little extra time in the Word the next day — point is: read it.

Read it Relationally: don't just read to get through it. Let your reading of it draw you into conversation with the Lord. Let it pull you into dialogue with God. If something challenges you, tell Him. If you don't understand something, ask Him.

Read it expectantly: Expect that He's going to speak to you. Expect God to respond. Be ready with a journal and a pen to write down what He might say. Be expectant that He'll be with you and that He'll answer you, lead you, and guide you.

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica and says, "*You received the Word. You let the word get into your life. You welcomed it! You brought it down into your life.*" and then he says...

1 Thessalonians 2:13

...you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

What does this tell us? Not only do we need to receive the word, but we've got to believe the word.

BELIEVE THE WORD

Hebrews 4:2

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

- if you don't believe the Word, it won't do you any good. It won't change you. It won't profit you in any way.

Paul says, "*you welcomed the word, not as the word of men, but as in the truth, the word of God...*"

- There are those who, when they read the scriptures, are not sure they believe the scriptures — because they haven't resolved the question of whether or not this truly is the word of God, or whether it is just the writings of men.

How do we know that what was written isn't just the words of men, but actually is the Word of God?

1. Accurate Prophecies

Jesus Himself had hundreds of Old Testament prophecies written about Him. He fulfilled more than 300 in His first coming.

place of birth, born of a virgin, his life & ministry, triumphal entry into Jerusalem... predicted to the exact day... from 600 years earlier! His betrayal, trial, crucifixion, casting lots for His clothes, none of His bones were broken, buried in tomb of rich man... not to mention the Old Testament prophecies that have been fulfilled before Christ and after Christ.

2. Authoritative Treatment

The biggest question that every human being needs to wrestle is, “*Who is this Jesus? Is He really who He claims to be?*” Christians obviously believe that He is, based not only on His own claims, but also on the overwhelming historical, biblical, and extra-biblical evidence for it.

One of the things Jesus does throughout the gospel writings is to treat the Old Testament authoritatively... he quoted the Old Testament writings over and over again throughout his life and ministry.

After the resurrection, when He was walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it says this...

Luke 24:27

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Jesus, not only reveals that the entirety of Scripture is centered on Him, He’s challenging these doubting disciples to treat the entirety of Scripture authoritatively.

Jesus is revealing what our relationship to Scripture ought to look like.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is breathed out by God...”

1. Astounding Obscurities

In Chuck Missler’s “The Bible in 24 Hours Study,” one of the most astonishing and convincing arguments for the Scriptures being inspired by God... being the Word of God... was Missler’s study on Genesis Chapter 5. Genesis Chapter 5 contains a genealogy — a list of names. Missler took the original root meanings of each of the names and strung the 10 generations together...

Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah

“[Man] [Appointed] [Mortal] [Sorrow] [The Blessed God] [Shall Come Down] [Teaching] [His Death Shall Bring] [The Despairing] [Comfort or Rest]”¹

These 10 generations spanned 1,056 years. Here is the gospel message — the plan of salvation — the fall of man, the mission of Jesus, and the victory of His death, prophesied & proclaimed in a genealogy of 10 generations in the very first book of the bible!

The Bible is alive and active, it is the Word of God... and we ought to treat it as such. Just as the Thessalonians received it, not as the word of men, but in truth, the Word of God... so should we.

So, we need to **receive the Word, believe the Word** and lastly... and most importantly, we need to...

¹ Chuck Missler, Genesis 5 Genealogy: <https://www.khouse.org/articles/2000/284/>

OBEY THE WORD

We can say we believe with our lips, but do we say we believe with our life?

- Jesus had harsh words for the religious leaders of his day who honored him with their lips, but their hearts were far from him....
- Paul warns Timothy about those who have a form of godliness but deny its power....
- **James 1:22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- Jesus says to us in... **John 14:15** if you love me, obey my commands.

Receiving the word, hearing the word, reading the word, and even believing the word — it's not enough.

**The Bible's *effectiveness for you*
is entirely dependent on your *obedience to it*.**

If you don't obey the word, the word won't benefit you.

Matthew 7:24-26

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and **does them**, I will liken him to a **wise man** who built his house on the rock: ²⁵ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. ²⁶ “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and **does not do them**, will be like a **foolish man** who built his house on the sand: ²⁷ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

There are two options...

There are two roads, one to life — one to destruction.

There are two trees, one produces good fruit — the other bad fruit.

There are two foundations, one is safe and secure — the other leads to a great fall.

If you wait until the storm comes to obey — it's too late.

Jesus says, “*If you obey my commands... if you put my teachings into practice... you're a wise person. And if you don't... you're a fool. If you don't do what I've commanded... if you just listen to me and don't take me or my teachings seriously and build your life on what I've said, you're a fool that's about to experience destruction when the storm comes.*”

What are you building your life on?

What foundation do you have beneath you?

Are you building your life on the commands of Christ? On the solid rock? On the firm foundation?

Are you obeying His commands?

Or are you just a hearer only?

Do you simply listen and deceive yourself into thinking that you've done what Christ has commanded you?

Is your life built on the rock or on the sand?

*The one thing that makes the difference, is putting Jesus' words into practice — it's **obedience**.*

Conclusion

It's not enough to receive the word, although it's a step.

It's not enough to believe the word, although that's a step.

We must receive, believe, and obey the word. *All three are necessary.*

- Where you've been lazy in receiving it, reading it — bring the word into your life.
- Where you've settled for simply listening to a sermon once a week, push beyond that — get serious about it.
- Read the Word regularly, relationally, and expectantly — and God will meet you there.
- Believe the word, overcome the obstacles of doubt — not by ignoring your doubts — but by facing them head on and wrestling through them.

Receive, believe, and obey.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between receiving the Word and believing the Word?
2. What is your biggest personal challenge in maintaining consistent Bible study in your life? How do you deal with it?
3. Are there any parts of the scripture that you struggle with believing? Discuss with the group.
4. Discuss, "The Bible's *effectiveness for you* is entirely dependent on *your obedience to it*."
5. Jesus Himself says that those who hear his words and *do* them are *wise* men; and those who hear his words and do *not* do them are *foolish* men. Are you a *doer* of the word, or a *hearer* only?

NOTES