

A Collision Course with the World

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16
Preached on: Sunday, December 13, 2015

We return again this morning to Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 2. 1 Thessalonians 2 where we have an amazing description of the difference between those who have been truly born again versus those who remain unregenerate. I've entitled my discourse to you this morning "A Collision Course with the World," and here we have a great example of that very collision. Follow along as I read the text that we will be looking at closely beginning in verse 13. 1 Thessalonians 2:13,

13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

You can really divide the world into two categories of people: there are those who love the word of God and live the word of God, and then there are those who hate the word of God and hate the people of God. Here in this text, we have a description of both.

As Christians, we are all increasingly aware of the growing opposition in our culture towards the Christian faith. We find ourselves being marginalized, persecution is mounting in various ways and, frankly, the culture is realigning itself in order to support a moral and even a sexual revolution. You go to virtually any college or university and lecture on Christian values and watch what happens. You will be heckled. You will be scoffed. You will probably not be able to complete your lecture. You will be called names that you don't even understand.

It should be no surprise that this kind of hatred of Christianity can affect many of us as believers. For example, Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." He's warning us that the world can unwittingly squeeze you into its mold; it can unwittingly cause you to adopt the values and the priorities of the culture. It can shape you into its image and before long you will begin to think and you will begin to act like people of this satanically dominated world system, people who are spiritually dead and at enmity with God. All you have to do is spend time on the television or watch the news, listen to the pundits and before you know

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it, you begin to kind of think like they do, act like they do, look like they do. But Paul says instead we need to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, in other words, saturate your mind with Scripture so that the Spirit will control you and help you manifest your redeemed nature.

But the world is so enticing, isn't it? It is so enticing. It is so attractive to us, so it's easy for us to succumb to the pressures, the hostility of the world, and also to be seduced by its passing pleasures. 1 John 2:16 says that we are not "to love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And the world, of course, speaks of orderly systems of evil that are in opposition to God. And, friends, you don't look for Satan's world systems in the bars and the brothels and the opium dens, you look for Satan in schools and universities; you look for him in our courts and our government; in our churches; in our seminaries, because he is less the ghoulish monster than he is the angel of light. Anything that tempts man to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Anything that seduces man to follow his will rather than God's will is part of Satan's world system. As John says, all that is not from the Father, all of those things that appeal to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life.

All you have to do is look around at people even in our culture and you will find that most are far more passionate about their career and their retirement accounts than they are eternal judgment. It almost sounds laughable when I say it, right? You watch many families and they exhaust themselves and spend more money than they really have so that their child can be an athlete or perhaps a musician or some kind of a celebrity, but they give no thought whatsoever to the eternal destinies of their soul.

This is the lure and the power of the world and Satan's world system is also designed in such a way to destroy pastors and churches. Let me tell you how that works. Every faithful pastor wishes more people would respond to the Gospel and come to his church to worship, to grow in Christ, to serve him. However, because of this, we can be very vulnerable to a heretical premise of modern evangelism that I believe has been advanced by Satan, that would have us believe that anyone can and will respond to the Gospel if it is just packaged and presented properly.

So we begin chasing all of these fads and techniques to get people to make decisions for Jesus. The evangelical pragmatists will argue that sinners must be viewed as religious consumers in need of a less offensive Gospel, in need of worship services where they can come in and feel at home. This is how you reach the unchurched, we're told, and what ends up happening is you embrace a new theology and a new philosophy of ministry that appeals to those who by nature hate God, who are dead in their sins with no hope of spiritual life apart from the very Gospel that we can become too ashamed to present.

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Paul endured similar criticism. Those who would tell us that you've got to adopt a new methodology because yours is outdated, he endured the same type of thing. If you read the New Testament, you will discover that false apostles infiltrated the churches that he had been a part of, and they argued that his evangelistic methodology was defective and his message was both offensive and ineffective and he agreed with the former, not the latter. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1 he agreed that it was offensive. He said, "Indeed, Jews asked for signs and Greeks searched for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumblingblock and to Gentiles foolishness." But he did not agree that it was ineffective. He went on to say, "But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, it is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Moreover and I want to remind you of this especially as we immerse ourselves in the text before us, Paul understood that salvation was the act of a sovereign God who must draw men unto himself and grant them repentance. It's not a product of clever techniques of preachers, nor is it even of the will of man but on God who has mercy, as Paul says in Romans 9:16.

Furthermore, he understood that the reason why so few people respond to the Gospel was not only because, yes, it's offensive to them, but it's certainly not because the worship services are just uncomfortable to them, but it's because they are spiritually dead. They have no capacity to accept the things of the Spirit of God. Those things are foolishness to him. And Jesus makes it clear, as well, that the unsaved love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. And then in addition to all of this, they prefer their unbelief because the god of this world, referring to Satan, has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ.

Now, the Gospel of Christ and the apostles is very different than the kind of Gospel that many places are preaching today and I want you to understand this. Many churches believe that the objective of the church is to, in certain ways, conform to the world so that the people who hate God will feel comfortable and think, "Hey, do you know what? We're really not all that different than you Christians. You know, I think I can buy into this deal. I think I'll accept Jesus into my heart because, after all, I've got problems in my life and maybe he can help me. Maybe I can become more happy, more successful, not to mention I can have some fire insurance in case that whole judgment deal is true."

But folks, Christ's objective for his church is not to make the church like the world so it will be liked by the world. Christ's objective for his church is rooted in the essence of divine holiness. For example, in Ephesians 5, Paul says, "that he might sanctify her," referring to the church. In other words, that he might make us holy. "That he might

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sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water and the word that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless." Beloved, this must be our understanding of the church and the power of the Gospel because this was at the heart of the apostolic ministry in the first century and this is what we witness in Paul's life and in his ministry, and we're going to see this play out in this text this morning.

Now, by way of review because I've been gone from you here for a couple of weeks, you will recall that in chapter 1, Paul defended his personal integrity and service to God because both were under attack. He knew that wherever God is at work, Satan's forces and those that he influences will rally en masse to tear down what God is doing. So Paul defended himself, not necessarily out of concern for his reputation, but because he was zealous for the Gospel. He was passionate about the reputation of Christ and the glory of the God that he served and he knew that his own personal integrity reflected upon all three. He knew that faithfulness of heart and service to God is far more important than fruitfulness of ministry. He knew that who a man is before God in the privacy of his heart is infinitely more important than what a man does for God in the public sphere of his ministry. Character counts in Christian service. So he knew that his life really matched his message and so he was not going to allow it to be discredited and therefore dishonor the Lord that he loved, and repeatedly he says, "You know the kind of man that we proved to be among you."

Now, as I said earlier, there are two kinds of people in the world and they are inevitably clashing with each other: those who love and live the truth of God; those who hate the truth of God and the people of God and this is what we see here. And so I wish to draw your attention to the characteristics of these two radically different groups. First we will look at the regenerate. They 1. love the word of God and, 2. they live the word of God. All right? Secondly, we're going to look at the unregenerate. They hate the word of God and they hate the people of God.

Now, you will also remember that Paul and Silas had to flee from Thessalonica to protect the lives of the other believers and even their own lives and Paul later on then sent Timothy back to encourage the believers there, new converts, baby Christians, to strengthen them in their faith. Then later Timothy comes, he brings a positive report concerning their faith. They were standing firm. They were persevering in the faith despite enormous persecution. And this thrilled Paul's heart and so from Corinth, he writes these two epistles.

So let's come together to this scene. You've got to get your imagination going here. It's a beautiful part of the world. They probably, those new believers met together probably in

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some type of a courtyard in the shade. There were both Jews and Gentiles that formerly hated each other, radically different cultures, that now had been radically changed and they are coming together to worship the living God. Brothers and sisters in Christ trying to figure out how to make that whole thing work by God's grace. So they come together and I'm sure they are excited because they are waiting to hear one of their brethren stand up and read a letter from the Apostle Paul. I'm sure the air is absolutely electric with excitement because they understand something, folks, that we must never forget: they understood that they were about to hear a word from God.

And a portion of it we have here that we're looking at this morning, verse 13, here's what they heard, Paul says, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." Here, dear friends, is the foremost mark of a true Christian. 1. They love the word of God. This is why Paul and Silas and even Timothy were constantly in a state of just continual gratitude from what God had done. "They received," he says, "the message of the Gospel." They knew that it was not human message, that it was from God. It was unspeakably sacred and transcendent and life-changing.

Now, this was contrary to the sophisticated sounding lectures of the itinerant philosophers that would come through town from time to time. This was their version of going to the movies. They would go and hear the latest lecturer, words that sounded erudite. They were clever, they were even compelling, but they did not penetrate the soul. They did not change lives. But not so the Gospel. You see, when they heard it by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, they recognized that the Gospel message of the apostles was of a divine origin and so it says that they received it and accepted it. In other words, they embraced it in their heart. By the way, this was evidence of their election. This is how Paul knew God had chosen them in chapter 1, verse 4. Certain proof that God had granted them repentance. He had given them the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit then caused them to be born again. This is the great miracle of regeneration. In Acts 17:4, we learn more about what happened. There Luke says, "And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women." What a magnificent reality that would have been to have beheld, to look at this, to see these people coming to Christ. And isn't it a joy to see that in our church and in our families?

Now, think of what Paul is saying here. They received and accepted what they heard. Why? Because they knew it was the word of God. Beloved, I would submit to you that this is a huge problem in the church today. Many professing believers simply do not believe this, that this is the word of God. "Some of it is, but maybe some of it isn't." Let

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me give you an example. Scripture is clear that homosexuality is a grievous sin. It puts people in bondage. "Those who practice it shall not inherit the kingdom of God," 1 Corinthians 6:9. And we are told to love them as all people and to warn them and to call them to repentant faith in Christ that they might be delivered from both the penalty and the power of their sins. But an increasing number of professing Christians are saying, "Well, I'm not so sure about that. You know, times are changing here. Moreover, what Paul said really is not what Jesus said. I mean, we all know the type of people they were back then so back in that culture in that day, they believed those things but times have changed, and in order for us to be relevant as Christians, we need to change with the times." So what begins to happen? The culture, the word of man becomes the spiritual authority rather than the word of God. Yet here we read in verse 13 that what Paul spoke was not the word of men but the word of God. Peter says the same thing in 2 Peter 3, beginning in verse 15. He talks about how Paul, "according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters." He's very clear.

Let me give you another example. Think about the debate over the ordination of women into pastoral ministry. Paul says clearly, 1 Timothy 2:12, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." And I've talked to professing believers who will argue, "Well, yeah, but Paul like all those Jews in that day and many Jews today, they were all chauvinists. We know that. I mean, that's just how they were back then and his opinion was consistent with the people of that ancient culture, but Jesus never said that a woman couldn't be ordained into Christian ministry." Folks, bottom line, we either accept apostolic authority or we don't. Paul says that all Scripture is inspired by God, not some of it, all of it is. So therefore are we to pick and choose? Are we going to accept what the apostles say here but not over there? What they say about the atonement, the resurrection, sanctification, glorification, heaven and hell, are we to throw those out too? Of course not.

In Galatians 1, Paul says in verse 11, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man." In other words, "I didn't make this up." "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." He didn't go to school to learn what he had to say, the Lord Jesus himself revealed these things to him. And folks, once you tamper with the word of God, you place yourself in the path of divine judgment. In Revelation 22, beginning in verse 18, John says, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book." By the way, the prophecy to which he refers there in the book of Revelation represents not only the close of the New Testament canon, but also extends to

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the whole of Scripture. You see, bottom line, true believers will not tamper with the text. They will not ignore it. They will not falsify it. They will not manipulate it. They will not alter any portion of Scripture. They will never deliberately reject apostolic doctrine. You want to ask yourself: where do I stand in relation to this? I mean, either the word of God is completely the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, all sufficient word or it's not.

The great British cleric and theologian and author, John Stott, said this, quote, "Every truly Christian ministry begins here with the conviction that we have been entrusted by God with a message to share with mankind; to share not our doubts but the revelation that God has directly given to the apostles and through them to us. Yet it is this conviction that is so disastrously rare in the church of today. It has become almost tedious to read of church leaders denying the faith which they have solemnly undertaken in their ordination to God to teach. Prominent theologians contradict fundamentals of Christianity without any apparent sense of embarrassment. A few years ago it was the fashion to deny the personality of the living God. Nowadays, it is the fashion to deny the deity of Jesus of Nazareth and patronizingly to describe him as perhaps the most wonderful man who has ever lived. There are multitudes of clergy," he goes on to say, "who preach today God's word with diffidence," which, by the way, means timidity, "and their own word with confidence and it is a disgrace to the church and a stumbling block to the world for the very first qualification for any authentically Christian service is a firm conviction that God has spoken in Jesus Christ and in the biblical witness of Christ given by the apostles that Scripture is God's word written down for the instruction of all subsequent ages and that it works powerfully in those who believe it. Our task is therefore to guard it, study it, expound it, and apply it to whatever people God sends us to be his servant." Folks, I pray that this is your conviction because many today who profess Christ do not believe this.

So this is why Paul and Silas and Timothy were constantly thanking God because "they received the word of God which you heard from us," he says. "You accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the word of God," and then he says this, notice, "which also performs its work in you who believe." This brings me to my second point: truly regenerated people will not only love the word of God, they will 2. live the word of God because it performs a work. It is effective. It is profitable. It bears supernatural fruit in a person's life, something that human words cannot do. He tells us in chapter 1, verse 9, that these people turned from idols to serve a living and true God which resulted in enormous ridicule and persecution.

Regeneration is such an amazing thing to behold, isn't it? When a person becomes a new creation in Christ and the old things pass away and the new things come. How many times I have seen the utter transformation of men and women who are enslaved by immorality, homosexuality, materialism, drugs and alcohol, pornography. People

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enslaved by bitterness and anger and various forms of Satanic entertainment, false religions, a myriad of idols. Then they hear the Gospel and the Spirit just turns them into another person. Oh, dear friends, this is the power of the Gospel and as a result, those who have truly been transformed in such a way will be willing to suffer for Christ.

And that's what we read here in verse 14. He says, "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea." Now, let's pause here for a moment. This is a fascinating phrase for several reasons. First of all, it's fascinating to see that here these people who didn't know any of the folks in Judea, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miles away, they come to know Christ and all of a sudden they imitate these people in the very same way: willing to suffer. And you'll see they imitate in other ways as well. It's a fascinating thing to go to other parts of the world and to meet people who come to Christ, meet new believers and even old believers, and find out, "Do you know what? I feel like I've known you all my life. We think the same things. We say the same things. We have the same worldview. We love the same things, hate the same things." It's amazing thing.

And one of the threads of commonality, if you will, is that true believers regardless of their culture, regardless of their geography, will be willing to suffer. That's why he said, "You became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out." In other words, "You heard the Gospel and it changed you. Now you're willing to suffer even from your own Gentile countrymen in the same way the Judean believers have suffered from their fellow Jews." What an astounding truth. Here's how it works, folks: we hear the Gospel, genuine apostolic truth, and when we hear it preached, we receive it, we embrace it in our hearts, and then we are radically changed, and as soon as the world sees that, it goes to war against us. It hates it. It hates us. But genuine believers will persevere. Again, this is why Paul and Silas and Timothy are in a perpetual state of exhilarating gratitude for God. I share that. Don't you share that as you see people that you know that love Christ and see them persevere even in the midst of great suffering?

Once again, this is the power of the word of God and this is why, for example, here at this church and there are many other churches like us, we are committed to just the verse by verse exposition of the word and the application of the word. Paul said in Colossians 1:6 that the Gospel is "constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth." That's the power of the word. We keep hearing it and it keeps changing us.

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Let me give you an example. We have the great joy and privilege of caring for our baby granddaughter who is just barely over a year old. About a week or so ago, Nancy ran out of the whole milk that is needed to go in the bottle with the formula. Well, she wasn't real sure if she should use the skim milk that I drink so she called the doctor and the doctor said, "Maybe just this one time but you really need to get the whole milk because she needs the fat to help her grow." Don't you wish doctors would tell us that, right? She needs the fat to help her grow and to be healthy. Folks, we need the word in order to grow. You've got to have that. "Like newborn babes," Peter says, "long for the pure milk of the word that by it you may grow in respect to salvation."

How sad it is to see people as I have, especially children in Africa, who are malnourished. Many times they have to wear tight things around their bellies that are protruding and swelled to somehow alleviate the hunger pains. Such a horrible thing. They are malnourished and how heartbreaking it is to see a spiritually malnourished believer. We all know that if you eat junk food all the time, if that's your diet, you're going to be lethargic, unhealthy and unproductive. Folks, the same thing is true spiritually. If your spiritual diet is kind of spiritual junk food, kind of the cotton candy sermonettes for Christianettes, those little inspirational ditties that you hear, sometimes topical sermons that you hear like that and even some of the lyrics that you hear in some of the Christian music, things that are utterly bereft of the life-giving nutrients of apostolic doctrine. If that's what you feed upon, you're going to be spiritually malnourished. You're going to be spiritually lethargic, unhealthy and unproductive. And likewise we know physically that not only do we have to eat right, we have to exercise. The same thing is true spiritually. If you don't exercise your faith, your spiritual muscles are going to atrophy. You're just not going to be all that useful.

Well, the early saints experienced the transforming power of the word of God and they loved that word and they lived that word. I want to give you an example briefly of what the word can do. In Psalm 19:7 through 11, the Holy Spirit gives us a powerful description of the effectiveness of the word. Let me just exposit that very briefly for you just to give you a sample of it. It's so precious. He says, "The law of the LORD is perfect," it means it's all-sufficient, "reviving the soul." Literally, the word of God will transform the inner man. It will renew you. He goes on to say that, "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple." This speaks of people who are lacking in their understanding of life and of God and of themselves and other people. He goes on to say that, "The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart." In other words, the word of God will give you peace and tranquility in the very core of your being and as a result, it will cause you to love the Lord your God with all of your heart from your innermost being. He goes on to say, "The commands of the LORD are radiant." The original indicates that Scripture is therefore pure. It is without error. It is untainted by sin.

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Then he says, "giving light to the eyes." The idea there is it enlightens our understanding of spiritual truths and it even brightens our outlook on life and even death because ultimately we are looking for glory. He says, "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever." In other words, Scripture does not change. It does not fluctuate with the fads of the culture. "The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous." In other words, Scripture reflects the righteousness and the glory of God. "They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is Your servant warned; In keeping them there is great reward." And by implication, by not keeping them, there is the forfeiture of blessing, the forfeiture of reward and joy as we end up grieving the Spirit and quenching him in our life. Oh, dear friends, I pray that you love the word because if you love it, you're going to live it even if it costs you your life.

As we look at the word of God, we see that it reveals to us the will of God. As you've heard me say before very simply, it is God's will that you be saved; it is God's will that you be sanctified; it is God's will that you submit to his leadership, his authority; it is his will that you serve; and it is his will that you suffer. And that's what these saints were willing to do. Paul told Timothy that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And Jesus warned his disciples, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me." Beloved, if you are truly committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, rest assured your life is on a collision course with the world. That's the reality of the world in which we live. But the Spirit will empower you through his word to persevere and that's why Paul says that the word of God performs its work in you who believe. Because of that, we will willingly suffer on God's account and endure suffering with confidence in God and for his glory.

Then finally, he contrasts the believing with the unbelieving. Notice that first of all, the unregenerate hate the word of God. He says in verse 15, speaking of the Jews, "who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out." By the way, there is no anti-Semitism here. You read in other passages that Paul was willing to give his life for his countrymen. He loved them so much. If they would just come to a saving knowledge of Christ. But they killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and he says, "and they drove us out." Why would they do that? Because they hated anyone with a message that they did not want to hear. The same thing is true today. The one that exposed their sin and called them to repentant faith. You see, people absolutely hate a message that doesn't fit the narrative of their depraved heart. They hated the Gospel because it exposed the futility of their self-righteous lawmaking. They hated the idea that Jesus was the Son of God so they couldn't buy the deity of Christ and they were filled with jealousy that God would offer salvation to the Gentiles. So Paul says that they drove us out. It speaks of tracking down

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an animal in order to kill it and so from the prophets to the apostles to the killing of Jesus, the Jews utterly despised the truth of God when it conflicted with their prejudices.

And nothing has changed. I was first introduced to this in my undergraduate studies. I remember in a sociology class back, this would have been in the mid-70s, I had to write a paper, all the students did, and the paper was on various views of marriage and the role of the husband and wife. So I thought, "Okay, I'll just give them God's perspective based on the word of God." So I took them to Ephesians 5:18 and following and some other passages, and I kept getting interrupted by the hecklers. The laughing. The scoffing.

Many years later in my doctoral studies, I remember a lot of the classes we would have to do, you would have to write papers and read them before your peers and before a panel of professors. And one of the papers I had to write on was abortion and I used the phrase, "I appeal to the authority of the word of God." Oh my goodness, talk about getting ripped apart by several of the liberal professors on the panel. "You don't know that that's the word of God. How do you know that? Just because it says it is? How do you know that the Bible is the word of God? There are many erudite scholars who will refute that assumption." One professor basically said and this is partly a paraphrase, "You lose all credibility if you use that phrase. It's arrogant, offensive, wrongheaded, and makes you look stupid." By the way, that professor never did like me. I'm not sure why. They said, "Instead use the phrase 'the Christian Bible or sacred writings or what some call the holy Scriptures,' but never call it the word of God." By the way, I'm thankful for that difficult experience and many others like it because it prepared me for pastoral ministry because that's mild compared to what I experience today.

But folks, this will always be the reaction of the unregenerate. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. To the natural man, the things of the Spirit are foolishness. They will hate the word of God but, secondly, they will hate the people of God. Notice at the end of verse 15, "They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved." Well, obviously, persecuting and murdering God's chosen messengers is high treason against the most high God, but we must understand that what was exceedingly abhorrent to the Jews was this idea that salvation could be offered to those Gentile dogs. I mean, that was like throwing gas on the raging fire of their prejudice. For example, the Jews in Jerusalem we are told in Acts 22, listened quietly to Paul until he said, "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go. I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live!" You want to make the Jews mad, just tell them that. Like flies on roadkill, Satan thrives on bigotry. We have to guard that in our hearts as well, dear friends.

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A Collision Course with the World

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

Preached on: Sunday, December 13, 2015

Well, this is to be expected. He says they, "hindered us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins." Literally in the original, they always heap up their sins to the limit. And he says, "But wrath has come upon them to the utmost." In other words, to the fullest expression of his holy fury. You know, many people choose to ignore the fact that while God is a God of love, he is also a God of wrath for those who reject his gift of love and the Gospel. And I want to warn each of you: there is a limit to what God will endure with respect to a man's rejection of the Gospel. In Hebrews 10:26 he says that "if we go on sinning willfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries."

Now, we must understand that for the Jews, the cup of divine wrath had already been filled up to the brim and it was running over with their iniquities by the time Paul wrote this. Over the years, they had killed the prophets who predicted the sufferings of their Messiah. Jesus comes along, their Messiah, and they kill him, the one who came to seek and to save the lost and give his life a ransom for many. Then they rejected the apostles who kept pointing them back to the cross. The Jews experienced the wrath of God way back in 605 BC when for 70 years they were under Babylonian captivity. Then 20 years after the writing of this epistle, the Romans are going to come in and absolutely destroy Jerusalem and kill over a million Jews and take many more, or many of them, into captivity.

But I would submit to you that this also speaks of God's wrath associated with the pre-kingdom judgments described in both the Old and New Testament when the Messiah King, the Lord Jesus, returns to establish his millennial reign upon the earth. But I would also add that even when this occurs, God is going to have mercy on a remnant of Israel. God is by no means finished with Israel, dear friends. God's gracious plan of redemption for his covenant people is clearly stated in Romans 9 through 11. The Jewish rejection of their Messiah did not nullify the unilateral, unconditional, irreversible covenants that God made with Abraham and David concerning the establishment of his earthly kingdom. It only postponed it. But the point here in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 is simply this: even as God poured out his wrath upon the Jews who hated the word of God and the people of God, so too he will pour out his wrath upon you if you reject the Gospel.

Well, dear friends, I hope those of you that know Christ, I hope you truly love the word and live the word, and as I said before, you're on a collision course with the world. You know that. You've already experienced that so I want to close with a very brief word of encouragement. You remember I said earlier that it is God's will for you to be saved, sanctified, submit, serve and suffer, well, can I give you just four more "S's"? And I hope

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this will be an encouragement to you as you collide with the world. You need to stand firm, stand out, stand together, and stand by.

Let me tell you what I mean. You need to stand firm in your faith. Paul says, "Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." In other words, submit yourself completely to the Spirit of God as he has revealed himself in his word. Let him control your life through the truths of his word and you will persevere with great joy.

Secondly, you need to stand out. Ephesians 5:8, "You were formerly darkness but now you are a light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." In other words, people need to look at you and say, "You know, there is something different, not odd, not weird but something different, about that person." They need to see your love, your kindness, your compassion, your boldness for the Gospel. They need to see Christ in you, in your demeanor, in your character.

Then thirdly, we must stand together. Philippians 1:27, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ, standing firm in one Spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel." Striving together is a reference to the Roman military tactical formation called the phalanx where a block of heavily armed infantry would stand shoulder together, many times kind of locking their shields together, spears protruding. Not too long ago with the young people over at the house, some of you may be here that where there, I gave an example of this. I took one of the junior high gals and I said, "I want you to stand in that doorway and I'm going to go through the doorway and I want you to keep me from going through." So she stood there kind of afraid. I said, "I'm not going to hurt you but just keep me from going through." So I walked up to the door and I just kind of picked her up and walked away with her. I said, "All right, let's get a couple more. I want you to lock arms with her." So now we've got three. They are standing in the doorway and they're really going to keep me out. So I came up to them and it was a little harder but it was still not too hard. Well, by this time, the boys at the table and going, "Put me up there." So I put the guys up there, all of them together, I don't know there were maybe seven or eight of them. I came up to the doorway and I couldn't budge them. I guess if I had run I might have done it, but you get the point. And I told the kids, "Folks, this is what it means. We've got to strive together. We need each other. We can't be fighting amongst ourselves. We need each other."

Then finally, we need to stand by. There was an old song we used to sing, "Your redemption draweth nigh." A great old song.

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Folks, Jesus is coming again. He is coming again just as he has promised so we need to keep looking for the blessed hope as Paul told Titus, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave himself for us." Oh, what a wonderful, glorious God we serve, amen? Amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that are so practical in our lives. May we live them for your glory and for our joy. And if there be one here today that knows nothing of what it really means to be in relationship with you, the living God, oh, how I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will overwhelm them with conviction, help them see the futility of even their best efforts, and help them to see their sin in light of the glory of the cross. May today be the day that they repent and place their faith in their only hope of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. May today be the day they experience the miracle of the new birth for it is in Christ's name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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