

Welcoming God's Word

1 Thessalonians 1:6

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Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bibles and open them to 1 Thessalonians 1.

How you receive and welcome the Word of God is important.

- **If you receive the Word correctly you can be thoroughly prepared for every situation.** 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- **If you welcome the Word of God it will guide you successfully through life.** Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." It will help you choose the right path regarding singleness, dating, marriage, parenting, and finances. It will guide you in your decision making about all areas of your life. It will become a lamp and a light on a path that looks uncertain.
- **If you accept the Word of God it can bring salvation.** James 1:18 says, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created." Every believer, at one time, accepted and welcomed the message about Jesus Christ and His salvation.

- **If you receive and apply God’s Word good things are going to happen.** Listen to Psalm 1:1, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. (2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law He meditates day and night. (3) He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” No matter what is happening around you, you can bloom and prosper where you are if you are delighting, meditating and applying the Word of God to your life.

It’s not just enough to hear the Word, you have to welcome it by mixing it with faith. The Thessalonian believers had welcomed the message of God, mixed it with faith, and it had brought about a transformation in their life to the degree that Paul tells them they had become a model to follow in the Christian life. Look with me at 1 Thessalonians 1:2 [read 1:2-10].

Paul has just told them he is convinced they are saved (1 Thess. 1:4). Then he begins a list of proofs and evidences of their salvation. When he gets to verse 6 he talks about how they received God’s message as proof of their salvation. From that statement we see several lessons about receiving the Word of God.

1. Welcoming God’s Word is accepting it as true.

Number one, welcoming God’s Word is accepting it as true. Paul tells them in verse 6 they “welcomed the message.” This means they received the Word of God and accepted it as it was. When you receive the Word of God into your life and believe it, that is when it becomes alive to you and you experience the blessings from it.

I realize that everyone does not receive God’s Word the same way. Jesus talked about this in Mark 4. In Mark 4 we see four different types of hearers when it comes to God’s Word. Everyone of us here today is one of these four. Let’s look at them quickly.

- **The first hearer is the disinterested listener.** Jesus describes this person like this in Mark 4:15, “Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was

sown in them.” The “path” Jesus is talking about was the hard places where people had walked and compressed the ground down and it was like cement. This person doesn’t understand the message (Matt. 13:19). They don’t get it. They are not interested in what God has to say. They are not interested in what God’s Word has to say about salvation, marriage, money, anger, heaven, hell, love, joy, peace, patience or anything else. They are disinterested. They are the hard path. They don’t welcome the message.

- **The second hearer is the delighted listener.** Jesus describes this person like this in Mark 4:16, “Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. (17) But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.” This person receives the news about Jesus “with joy.” They get excited about what they have learned from God’s Word regarding marriage, love, parenting, grace, heaven, hell, or whatever. It sounds great to them. They get excited about it. They only have an emotional response to it. There is no depth or root to what they heard. As soon as obeying the Word of God causes their life to get difficult they immediately turn away. This is the person that seems to get excited about Jesus for a few weeks or a few months then goes back to their old lifestyle.
- **The third hearer is the distracted listener.** Jesus says in verse 18, “Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; (19) but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.” This person will hear what you have to say about Jesus, God, heaven, hell. They may agree with you and say that you are right. They may even say they need to accept Jesus in their life and get some things right with God. But because of their worry over their health or kids, desire for wealth, career advancement, popularity, power, possessions and “other things” they do not receive the Word. Their distraction by the worries of life and deceitfulness of wealth “choke” God’s Word from them spiritually so they cannot swallow God’s Word deep into their lives.

- **The fourth hearer is the dedicated listener.** Jesus described this listener like this in verse 20, “Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown.” This person will hear the gospel or hear God’s Word on any subject and believe it and understand it. Notice this listener “accepted” and welcomed the Word of God. The way we know that is because it produced fruit from his life. The way you know that you welcome God’s Word is by the fruit you produce.

Those who welcome the Word of God are those who accept it as true and apply it to their life.

2. Welcoming God’s Word is evidence of your salvation.

Number two, welcoming God’s Word is evidence of your salvation. Beginning in verse 4, Paul is listing some quality traits about them that identify them as believers. One of those characteristics is how they received the Word of God [read 1:4-6]. Paul was able to see that divine crop produced in their life 30, 60, or a 100 times more than what was sown. He was able to see the change in their life. He was able to see a transformation in their life.

- They were more loving to their spouse and children.
- They were less angry and more at peace.
- They were less sarcastic and more patient with people.
- They were less rude and more kind to others.
- They were less selfish and more service oriented toward others.

They weren’t just hearers only, but they were doers of the Word. When you receive the gospel of Jesus Christ and His message you demonstrate you have been born again. Jesus mentioned this in John 15:8 when He said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” How you live is evidence of whether or not you are really a follower of Christ. You can say you believe in Jesus all you want, but the real evidence of your salvation is seen not heard. Their life connected with their faith in Christ.

3. Welcoming God's Word may produce suffering.

Number three, welcoming God's Word may produce suffering. Look at verse 6 again, "In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message..." This word "suffering" (thlipsis) can be used of outward pressure or emotional stress. The phrase "severe suffering" can be illustrated by grapes being squeezed until the juice comes out. These Thessalonian believers were being squeezed and put under pressure but what came out of them was not anger, bitterness, and rage but "joy in the Holy Spirit" as we will see in a moment.

What I want you to see right now is that when you receive God's Word and apply it to your life it may result in some kind of suffering, discomfort, and pain. Let me give you an example of this. In Acts 17 you read about the start of this Thessalonian church. Paul and Silas had been doing some evangelism and teaching about Jesus Christ. While there they stayed at a guys house named Jason. There were some people who got really mad about this teaching about Jesus and He being the only way to heaven. They got so mad the Bible says, "they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city" (Acts 17:5). This mob decided to go to Jason's house to get Paul and Silas and beat them up. But when they got there they didn't find Paul or Silas so they took Jason and dragged him out of his house and threw him before city officials, shouting accusations at him. To make a long story short Jason ended up having to post bond to be let go. Jason was humiliated, threatened, and lost money because of his support and acceptance of the Word of God.

Let me give you a few quick thoughts about suffering before we move to our final point.

- Suffering is one of those things that can prove whether or not your faith is real. In describing various types of people and how they receive God's Word Jesus said in Matthew 13:21, "Since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." When trouble or persecution comes because of you trying to obey God, you will find out whether or not God's Word really took root in you or not. Suffering will test the reality of your faith in Christ.

- Suffering for being a Christian is not new (1 Pet. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:12). Listen carefully to 1 Peter 4:12, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. (13) But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. (14) If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (15) If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. (16) However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

One of the reasons Paul was so confident that these Thessalonians were true followers of Christ is because they had received God’s Word in spite of the difficulty of following Christ would cause in their life.

4. Welcoming God’s Word will be accompanied by joy.

Number four, welcoming God’s Word will be accompanied by joy. Back at 1 Thessalonians 1:6 Paul told the Thessalonian believers they “welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Again, part of the proof of your salvation is receiving the message of Christ with joy. There are two things I want you to see about this.

- **First, our joy comes from the Holy Spirit.** This “joy” is “given by” the Holy Spirit. This is a supernatural act of God the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer who receives His message. The Christian possesses a special caliber of soul due to the “joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Romans 14:17 says, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

- **Second, our joy is not dependent on circumstances.** People who can transcend their situations do not constantly complain about their problems. Suffering and joy are not mutually exclusive. To the Christian, both can exist simultaneously (2 Cor. 8:1-2; 1 Peter 1:6-9; 4:12-13). This reminds me of an incident in Acts 5 with the apostles. After the Sanhedrin flogged them, ordered them not to preach the gospel again, and released them, “they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

As a believer you will discover your trials will not go away. The heat will be on, and it may get hotter. But, as only the Lord can, He makes it up to you in another way. Your life becomes richer. You are buoyant, even though all is sinking around you. God never short-changes His people. You can discover, what the first Christians discovered that according to Nehemiah 8:10, “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Conclusion

How you receive and welcome the Word of God is important. When you accept it as true and put it to work in your life by applying it, it becomes evidence that you are who you say you are – a follower of Jesus Christ. However, sometimes welcoming the message and applying it will cause suffering and difficulty in your life that’s when you will find out whether or not you really accepted it. Yet, even in difficult circumstances created by obeying God’s Word you will discover a secret joy that only comes from the Holy Spirit given to those who welcome God’s Word in spite of the suffering it may bring.

The first message you need to receive from God’s Word is the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. [Lead them in a prayer of salvation].