

HOLY WAITING

Living in Holiness as We Await the Return of Christ

A Holy Response To the Word of God

Key Idea:

God's holy people are continually formed by an eager, faith-filled reception of His Word, while those who reject it find themselves increasingly hardened against God Himself — to their own ultimate destruction.

Key Text:

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! (1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 ESV)

Key Points:

- **God's people receive the preached Word as the Word of God.** When the Thessalonians heard Paul's preaching, they accepted it not as a human opinion but as the very Word of God — an act of Spirit-worked faith that Paul sees as evidence of their election (1 Thess. 1:4–5; 2:13). The Reformation's Second Helvetic Confession echoes this: "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God." This same reception is owed to faithful Gospel preaching today.
- **Receiving the Word in faith means testing it by Scripture.** The Bereans model the proper posture of the believer: they eagerly welcomed the preached Word and examined the Scriptures daily to verify what they were taught (Acts 17:11). Receptivity and discernment are not opposites — Christians are called to both, holding the preached Word in high regard while always testing teaching against the written Word of God.
- **The Word of God works powerfully and continually in those who believe.** Paul's language in 2:13 is present tense — the Word "is at work" in believers, an ongoing, active reality. Like a sharp sword (Heb. 4:12), Scripture penetrates and shapes not just at

conversion but throughout the Christian life. Those who receive the Word in faith are continually being formed by it.

- **Rejecting the Word of God is rejecting God Himself.** The opponents Paul describes in 2:14–16 stand in a long line of those who rejected God’s messengers — the prophets, Christ Himself, and now the apostles. Their resistance to the Gospel is not a neutral religious disagreement; it is active opposition to God and to the salvation of others. Drawing on Jesus’ words of judgment in Matthew 23:31-36, Paul warns that such persistent rejection fills the measure of sin and draws down divine wrath.
- **The same Word softens some and hardens others.** One cannot remain neutral before the Word of God. Like the sun that softens wax and hardens clay, the Gospel divides: those who embrace it in faith are transformed, while those who resist it become increasingly hardened against God. This reality calls every hearer to honest self-examination: how am I responding to the Word?

Discussion Questions:

- Bret opened with his own experience of hunger for God’s Word following his conversion. Has your relationship with Scripture changed over time? What has that change looked like?
- Paul was grateful that the Thessalonians received his preaching not as a human word but as the Word of God (2:13). What does it mean in practice to receive a sermon that way? How does that posture differ from how we might otherwise approach a church service?
- The Second Helvetic Confession says, “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.” Do you find that a challenging claim? What is it based on, and what does it require of us as listeners? How does this statement fit with the idea of “sola Scriptura” – which the authors of that statement agreed?
- The Bereans were commended for both eagerly receiving the Word and examining the Scriptures daily to test what they heard (Acts 17:11). How do you hold those two things together? Is one harder for you than the other?
- Paul says the Word “is at work” in believers — present tense, ongoing (2:13). Where do you currently sense the Word actively at work in your life? What areas of resistance do you notice?
- The opponents in 2:14–16 thought they were serving God, yet Paul says they were displeasing to Him. How is it possible to be religiously zealous and yet opposed to God? What warnings does that carry for us?
- Paul says those who hinder the Gospel “oppose all mankind” (2:15–16) — because they block the only message that can save. How does this reframe the way we think about sharing or protecting the Gospel in our own context?

- Bret described the Word of God as something that “can blow away the fog and renew my mind to see the truth clearly.” Can you think of a time when Scripture did that for you? What was the fog, and what did the Word clarify?
- The outline describes two responses to the Word: an eager, faith-filled reception that forms God’s people, and a persistent rejection that hardens one against God. Where do you see yourself in that picture right now? What might need to change?

For Further Study

- On the authority and power of the preached Word, and how it is God’s normal means of calling and instructing His people, see the [Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 1](#).
- For a deeper look at Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23 that forms the basis of Paul’s words about the pattern of Israel’s rejection of God’s messengers and the coming judgement of God, see the teaching “[Extended Cut: Israel Judgement Day](#)”.
- For a deeper study on receiving God’s Word, see the teaching “[Devoted – The Word of God](#)” and especially the handouts found on the teaching page.
- Watch this week’s episode of [After Hours](#) (available on Tuesday) to learn some tips to fully receive God’s Word.
- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by [series](#), by [Scripture](#), or by [topic](#) for a deeper study of the [Word of God](#); [gospel](#); [salvation and deliverance](#); [holiness](#); [persecuted church](#); [judgment](#).