

Faith in a Hostile Environment

1 Thessalonians 2:9-16

It is said, 'you are what you eat.' This is also true for our hearts – what we find our minds on, what we watch, listen, read – the messages of our surroundings - shape who we are. This is interesting, because in today's passage Paul talks about the message he was spreading and the effect it had on those who heard it.

The Good News of God

Paul describes how he proclaimed the gospel of God. The job of a herald was to announce the king's message, not to make up his own message. His only authority was because he was bringing the king's message. So Paul says it was God's gospel he was bringing. This was how the Thessalonians received it.

When you receive the gospel as God's word it becomes of infinite importance. If it is just man's word it can be put alongside all the other influences in your life – but not if it is God's.

They welcomed it into their lives because it was *good news*. It was not an announcement of what they must do for the king, but what the king, Jesus, has done for them. When you receive it like this it has power in your life, to change your life.

The Gospel and your Character

Paul called two witnesses to testify as to what he was really like and what his motives were: the Thessalonians and God himself. Character is what we are in the dark, and God sees what we are in the dark. Paul can say he had been holy and righteous. Only the gospel can do this. If you think you are saved by you meeting a standard, it will either make you proud or depressed, but it cannot make you holy. Only grace can do that: because Jesus met the standard for us. And knowing he did that gives us the desire to live holy for him.

The Gospel and Your Conduct

Paul highlights how they handled money and work: they were willing to be burdened so the Thessalonians weren't. This is what the gospel does: Jesus was burdened that we might be unburdened, he gave so that you and I might have. Knowing that does something in your heart.

Then he highlights how they treated others: they encouraged them as a father, to pursue what is best: to walk worthy of God. This was not to live obeying a list of rules, but to live as the citizen of the kingdom God has called us into.

The Gospel and Trouble

How do you *really* know that the word of God is doing something in someone's life? Paul says, by the way they respond to suffering. There is a kind of religion that is strident in its opposition to the gospel. But the gospel changes the way you respond to such opposition. It changes what you love and what you fear the most: God. It changes how you see those who oppose you: you can love them. It tells you that you don't need to take revenge, but to leave room for God's wrath.

And knowing that Christ suffered for you gives you an inner strength when you face suffering.