

Face-to-Face with the Table

1 Thessalonians 2.13-16

Fair warning: If you haven't yet read this week's text, be prepared to gasp. Here the writers say some very harsh things. So first, make sure that you read this passage in its entire context. Read these verses together. Then, make sure you read them *carefully* before you pass judgment. In fact, there is a display here of three different ways people can react to the gospel (which they refer to here at *the word of God*). Take some time with the questions, but don't beat yourself up if you can't get to all of them!

Pastor Eric

The Gospel

How would you define the *gospel*? What part of the gospel tends to stand out most to you, and why?

The gospel is described here as centered entirely on Jesus—not ideas, ethics, or spirituality. How does that challenge common views of Christianity today?

Paul celebrates the Thessalonians' response to the gospel with thanksgiving. What was it about their response to the gospel that made it different from simply "hearing" it?

Accepting vs. Receiving

What's the difference between *receiving* the word and *accepting* the word, as described in this passage? How does the phrase, *you who believe*, in verse 13 help clarify that?

What do you think it looks like when someone accepts the word of God *as a human word*, not as the word of God (verse 13)? Where do you see people (or yourself) tempted to treat the gospel as "one opinion among many?" Why do you think indifference to Jesus can feel safer than either belief or outright rejection?

Jesus' parable of the seed suggests that hearing doesn't always lead to reception. What tends to prevent the word from "sticking"?

The Gospel at Work

By way of contrast, Paul says that the word of God is *at work* in those who believe. What does that look like in real, everyday life?

Note Philippians 2.13. Have you ever experienced that inner spiritual energy—the desire *and* the ability to move to work for the good? How do you distinguish between trying harder in your own strength and allowing God's power to work in you? What helped cultivate it?

Resistance, Indifference, & Hostility

Who were the people Paul refers to as killers of Jesus and the prophets, etc.? Why was Jesus so polarizing then? Why is he so polarizing today?

Which of the three responses to the gospel most resonate with you right now: acceptance, indifference, or resistance? Why? What might "present-tense belief" look like for you this week?