

1 Thessalonians 2 – God’s Word or a Message of Human Invention?

There was a time when people in the USA or the larger western world could hear the words of Jesus and be pressed to decide what to do about them. Think about the “Lord, liar or lunatic” trilemma from C.S. Lewis: Was Jesus crazy? Was he lying? Is he truly Lord of all? But the stakes have now changed. The case for many has shifted to different realm altogether. Consider this assertion by Jon Murray, former president of American Atheists.

“There was no such person in the history of the world as Jesus Christ. There was no historical, living, breathing, sentient human being by that name. Ever. [The Bible] is a fictional, nonhistorical narrative.”

Murray died back in the 90s and many radical re-interpreters of Jesus have risen up to take his place. The question is no longer, “What did Jesus mean by what he said?” as it was for C.S. Lewis. It is more like, “What did Jesus really say?” or, “Did Jesus exist at all?” The assumptions now go against Jesus from the start, more like: “Isn’t the Bible simply a work of fiction?” or, “Do you really base your life on such fairy tales?” The debate can now fairly be stated as, “Is the Bible merely the word of the men who wrote it, or is it truly the word of God?” As it happens this was actually the very question that was faced by the earliest Christians as the gospel message moved out from Jerusalem into the larger Greco-Roman world. It’s the question the Thessalonians faced when they were first visited by Paul.

It’s vital that we take the gospel message and the Bible itself for what it truly is – the Word of God.

2:1-3 Conflict, persecution, hardship – none of these are reasons to give up on our faith or our witness. If we want to be used by God we may have to be bold in the midst of conflict.

Jesus warned that there would be those who would give up their faith when times got tough.

Matt 13:3-6 NKJV ³Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. ... ⁵Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Matt 13:20-21 NKJV ²⁰But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

2:2 **the gospel of God** Nobody sat down and made up the gospel. The narrative of Jesus’ life is a matter of historical record. The meaning of Jesus’ life was revealed to his followers by Jesus himself and later expounded upon by the apostles.

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2:3 **not from error, uncleanness or deceit** The gospel is a matter of fact or fiction, of truth or falsehood, not a matter of opinion.

2:4-12 Marks of true and false ministry:

False ministry includes:

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| 1. Man-pleasing | In this context, telling people what they want to hear. |
| 2. Flattery | excessive or insincere praise |
| 3. Covetousness | Greed |
| 4. Seeking glory from men | Self-seeking, looking for rockstar or celebrity status. |

True ministry includes:

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| 1. Gentleness | easy, composed, peaceable, affable (diffusing warmth and friendliness). |
| a. | A mother doesn't expect much from a baby. In the same way it's wise not to expect too much from a new believer. People need time to grow in their faith. |
| 2. Hard-working | Ministry is not for lazy people. |
| 3. Not burdensome | Keep your financial expectations low. |
| 4. Speaking God's word | The message is not our own, but God's. Note "the gospel of God in vv.8 & 9. |
| 5. Integrity | moral soundness, ethical behavior. |
| 6. Parental concern | Paul uses both mother and father to describe his heart. |
| 7. An expectation of growth | Earlier we mentioned that people need time to grow – they also need to grow after the proper amount of time. |

2:13 The word of God The Thessalonians received the Word of God from Paul as exactly that – the Word of God.

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2:14-15 Again, the church in Thessalonica was born in the midst of persecution, but they still remained strong in their faith.

2:16 Paul believed that people were saved by responding to the gospel. Standing in the way of the preaching of the gospel is tantamount to preventing the salvation of the lost.

2:17-20 Paul had a great relationship with this church and longed to spend more time with them, but Satan hindered his ministry. Satan always stands in the way of effective ministry.

Conclusions: The Bible as God's Word

Three Main lines of Thought:

1. Historical Reliability
2. Scientific Reliability
3. Biblical Exclusivity

1. Historical Reliability

- In summary, what can we conclude about the figure of Jesus Christ by only listening to non-Christians of the first centuries? That he was an invented myth? Absolutely not. **Just by listening to Jesus' enemies and outsiders, we can put together the following profile on Christ and his influence; the sum of which positively affirms the believability of the Bible and deity of his person:**
 - Jesus was a wise man and was called the Christ or Messiah, (Josephus)
 - Jesus gained many disciples from many nations, (Josephus)
 - He healed blind and lame people in Bethsaida and Bethany, (Julian the Apostate)
 - He was accused of practicing sorcery and leading Israel astray, (the Talmud)
 - Under Herod, and during the reign of Tiberius, Pontius Pilate condemned Christ to die, (Tacitus)
 - Christ was crucified on the eve of Passover, (the Talmud)
 - His crucifixion was accompanied by three hours of unexplained darkness, (Thallus)
 - Christ's disciples, "reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive;", (Josephus)
 - His disciples took to the habit of meeting on a fixed day of the week and took their name "Christians" from him, (Pliny)
 - They gave worship to Christ "as to a god", (Pliny)
 - They bound themselves over to abstaining from wicked deeds, fraud, theft, adultery, and lying, (Pliny)
 - Christians held a contempt for death and were known for a voluntary self-devotion, (Lucian)
 - Christians believed themselves all brothers from the moment of their conversion, (Lucian)
 - Christians lived after Christ's laws, (Lucian)
 - Christians were willingly tortured and even executed for their refusal to deny their belief in the resurrection and deity of Jesus Christ. (Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny, Lucian)(from provethetbible.net)

2. Scientific Reliability

- Fine tuning
 - for life in the universe
 - for life on earth.
 - [List from Hugh Ross at Reasons to Believe](#)
- Evidence for Design in Life (Intelligent Design)
 - **Irreducible Complexity** – Living things are made up of cells, maybe one, maybe many, but an individual cell is an incredibly complex thing.
 - **Specified Complexity** – the information contained in DNA

3. Biblical Exclusivity

- What about other religions?
 - The Bible claims to be the word of God.
 - Other religions may have superficial similarities with Christianity, but at their foundations religions teach very different, even contradictory things.
 - It's possible, then, that all religions are false.
 - Non-contradiction says they cannot all be true

Link to Winfried Corduan, [Why I Believe the Bible Alone is the Word of God.](#) Compares the Qur'an; The Avesta (Zoroastrianism); The Adi Granth (Sikhism); the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita (Hinduism); The Pali Canon and Lotus Sutra (Buddhism); The Daodejing (Daoism); The Analects (Confucianism); and The Kojiki, Nihongi and Amatsu Norito (Shinto).

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Finally

“They always think you are recommending Christianity, not because it is true, but because it is good. Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.” C.S. Lewis.