

2014_10_26 Reformation
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Trustworthy Teachers Do Not Speak As Men

1 Thessalonians 2:1–13

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From our risen Lord, who has ascended on high, who has given gifts to men, who remains with us in the preaching of the everlasting gospel, and who commissions us to speak His word faithfully – grace and peace to you. Amen.

Some people are really good with words. Maybe you've remember a conversation you've had with a good salesman. Or maybe you've heard a good politician speak at a rally. But how often does that good salesman or good politician whose words are empty. They make promises and break promises. That product you were convinced was full proof is now full of problems. We vote someone in to office only to find them slowly backing down; or powerless to do what they have promised? We want a candidate or salesman we can trust; someone who is true to their word; who will keep their promises.

As we take up our text today, how much more so should we have this concern with those who speak for the Lord. We want pastors whom we can trust; teachers who are true to the word; a God who will keep His promises. Trustworthy Teachers Do Not Speak As Men; we see this in three examples: Paul spoke the effective Word of God; Luther spoke the effective Word of God; We speak the effective Word of God.

We pray, Lord, sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 2:1–13

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. ³ For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

⁴ But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. ⁸ So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God,

but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. ⁹ For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; ¹¹ as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

¹³ For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

In Jesus name, dear fellow redeemed,

1. Paul spoke the effective Word of God

As soon as a politician opens his mouth, he's at risk of being pushed into the "out-crowd." There are certain controversial issues that put a politician in the danger zone. Whether its an issue like gay marriage or abortion; immigration or taxation; a candidate easily puts himself at risk. They could easily alienate one group of voters whose vote they need; or discourage another group of lobbyist whose support they need. They need to do what they can to remain part of the "in-crowd."

The Thessalonians might have wondered about Paul. When the Apostle Paul comes to Thessalonica, he finds a city already stirred up by religious advertising. Thessalonica is located in Greece – a culture known for its philosophers and political peddlers. How many peddlers had already come and gone? How many were motivated by one thing: how is your sack of money going to serve their special interests. How many used whatever flattering words were needed to get what they were after? Was this Paul of Tarsus just another in a long line of empty words, come to make some money from gullible people and ready to move on? Could the people trust his promises?

So he writes,

1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

When Paul comes to Thessalonica in A.D. 50., he immediately places himself at risk. He goes to the synagogue and waits for the opportunity to stand and speak; and when he

stands, he does not speak as men speak. He addresses what that synagogue will perceive as the most controversial issue of all – is Jesus the Christ?

The people had heard of a Messiah, but not the same Messiah as this Paul was preaching. They knew of a Messiah that was coming to reward the in-crowd and bring wrath upon the out-crowd. They knew of a Messiah who comes to glorify a certain status; an earthly heritage; earthly achievements; and to cast out all others who are part of that crowd.

In Greek it was called: “to euangellion” – Paul preached “the gospel.” He came to the synagogue and spoke good news which was to all people; Jew and Gentile alike. But it was just this euangellion that would divide the synagogue. He preached Jesus – the Christ who came not for a certain status; heritage; achievement; He comes for the out-crowd; the sinners; the lost – those who deserved no place in God’s community. For this they had already driven him out of the nearby city of Philippi. And it would raise much conflict here too.

It reminds us of what the Pharisees said to Jesus in Matthew 21: “by what authority do you do these things?” Jesus did not come from the “in-crowd.” He did not derive his authority from the priesthood or from the temple or from the national council. So where did he get His authority?

He would not bother to say. Instead Jesus let the word speak for itself. Instead, Paul let the word speak for itself. And when God’s word speaks, it needs no confirmation from the in-crowd or the religious elite or the scholars or popular opinion. For when God’s word speaks, Jeremiah writes: “It is like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces” (Jer. 23:29).

It breaks the rock of our heart; exposing the controversial state of affairs. And this will indeed offend. It will offend us when hear that all we have done counts for nothing. It will offend us when we hear that our status in society; our Lutheran heritage; our church membership; our achievements: job, family, home, money – it is worthless when it comes to our salvation.

But Paul did not come to flatter. As he says in verse 4, he came not to please men; but to serve God. Rather than a peddler, He spoke as a parent. As a father, even as a mother, Paul cared for this congregation. “We were gentle among you as a nursing mother ... we exhorted and comforted you as a father.” As gentle as a mother and as stern as a father – this was Pastor Paul. He comes not as lord of the Thessalonians, but as parent, ready to give his own life for these his children; he nourished them with the milk of the

gospel; he encouraged them to grow up in the Spirit; he comforted them with the knowledge that God will not break His promises; and he charged them to walk worthy of the kingdom of God.

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

2. Luther spoke the effective word

Sometimes politicians need to backpedal. They perhaps state something that is true, but are forced to retract or face a backlash from the media or certain interest groups. When we vote we are looking for someone we can trust; someone who won't back down from his beliefs and who stand by his words.

The choice confronted Martin Luther in 1521. Surely you've overstated yourself, Dr. Luther. You cannot mean to say that the papacy cannot be trusted. You cannot mean to say that the pope does not have the sole authority to forgive sins. You cannot mean to say that forgiveness is free and comes to those who have done nothing to deserve it. It is time to backpedal. At stake was his relationship with the most powerful interest group in all of the world: the holy Roman papacy.

He was summoned to Wormz (vormz) by order of the Emperor himself. Luther faced a choice: backpedal or be declared an outlaw. Where would he stand?

Luther had challenged many of the practices of the church in his day. And it began with the sale of indulgences. The Roman church was claiming that through their church offerings, they could receive forgiveness. They offered slips of pardon and called them indulgences. This was one of the first teachings Luther challenged.

Luther was making the claim that the authority to forgive sins is not something reserved for select "in-crowd" within the church but belongs to the Church itself; and thereby, to every Christian. The picture which Luther wanted to paint was a picture of Christ reaching out to us wherever the Church is making use of the Word and the Sacraments; there He reaches out from heaven to touch us on earth and to give us what He has promised without reservation: forgiveness, life, and salvation. The problem was, at the same time Michelangelo was painting another picture.

One of the major projects being funded by the Roman Church in the early 16th century was the building of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo had just completed one of the

most renowned works of art the world has known. The Sistine Chapel was a project that would put Rome in debt. And how would they pay for this great project? Indulgences. Luther was a threat to Rome theologically, politically, and financially.

So while Michelangelo was behind the scenes for money, painting the scenes, Martin Luther was painting another scene for free: a gospel that comes at a cost we could never pay, which has been paid in full by Christ, and which has been given freely to the Church to distribute without restriction or requirement. He preached a Christ who stood reaching out wherever the Word is being heard, touching those in the out-crowd, on the outskirts, and bringing you into the gospel of His grace. Christ is reaching out in the Word, working, active, forgiving you freely, claiming you as His own, and exercising an authority that belongs to Him alone.

Luther would not backpedal; he took the politically incorrect stance and was labeled an outlaw. So he would say: "I do not trust either in pope or or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

3. We speak the effective word

Votes are what matter. If you don't win the election, then you can certainly do nothing to change things. So, the votes matter. The polls matter. Campaigns are concerned with numbers.

We have to watch out for getting caught up in the wrong campaign. There is a campaign in the church that lures us with ads and polls. It is the church mammon movement; and it measures success by numbers.

v.1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

How do we measure the value and effectiveness of our work as a church? How do we know that our labor is not in vain? Our congregation is currently made up of 15 family households, with a total of 47 members. Over the last four years we have lost 7 members and gained 10. Of course, most of those changes were transfers in and out from other CLC congregations. In 2011, our average attendance was 24; in 2012 our

average attendance was 24; in 2013 our average attendance was 24; and can you guess what our average attendance is so far this year? yep, 24.

God does not count like we do. He brings us an effective word that is never in vain. Every single soul that is hearing this word today is more than a number. And that word we speak is not for the sake of boosted church attendance, or a boosted budget.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.

This is what made Paul's visit valuable. This is what made Luther's stand worth it. And this is what our ministry effective. It will not always please or flatter people; it will not put us in the top 100 churches in America in terms of numbers; but we've been entrusted with the gospel; and like Paul, like Luther, we are being tested.

But God does not count like we do. He does not measure value in terms of polls; church status; church heritage; church membership; church attendance; in fact, he does not count at all – he does not count our works – for they are valueless apart from Christ; and even more so, he does not count our sins against us. This is what gives the word power – it is all God's work, all his doing in Christ – a salvation that is all to his credit.

This is our courage to take a stand, even when it is not politically wise. This is our courage to stand even when it goes against our own special interests. This is our courage to walk worthy of the kingdom into which we've been called.

So we return again to that word. To understand better what we believe and stand for. Not just to accept all teachings because they have come down from church authorities: there is no such thing here. These teachings come from the authority of the Church, that is, from Christ who is reaching out to us in the word, to touch you, to forgive you, to work in you the power to walk worthy of His kingdom. We speak the effective word.

Some people are really good with words. But what we want are pastors who are really good with THE WORD. We want trustworthy pastors – those who speak not as men speak, who are not men pleasers, who are not concerned with polls. We want pastors whom we can trust; teachers who are true to the word; because only then do we find a God keeps His promises.

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Amen.