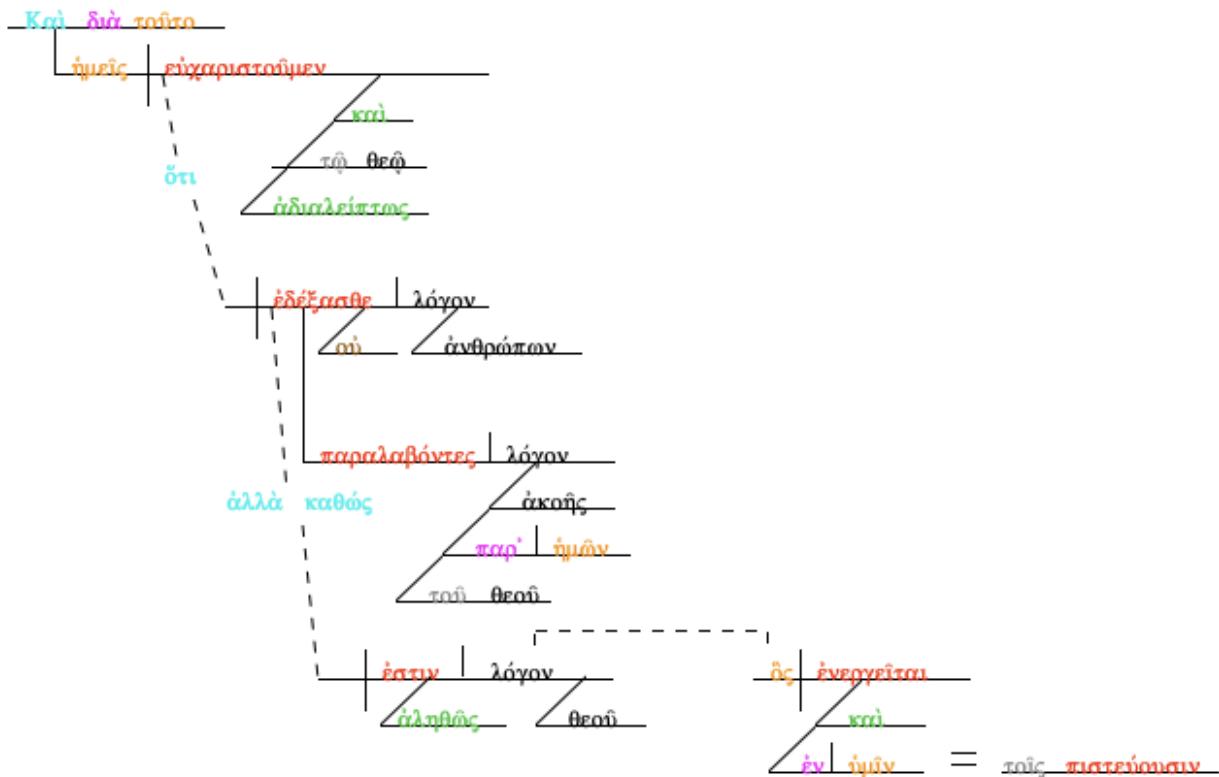


Exposition of 1 Thessalonians 2:13 at Wheelersburg Baptist Church on December 28, 2025

1Th. 2:13



OPENING: Missionary Story - half

<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/evangelism.htm>

Assemblies of God missionary Del Tarr passed away earlier this year. He was a missionary and professor of missions for about 40 years. He spoke of his experience in West Africa's Sahel in his sermons on Psalm 126. A family's entire survival depends on a small sack of grain. The rainy season lasted for months: May through August. By April of the following year, their bellies ache from hunger. Tarr narrated a scene that he saw play out often: a young boy discovers the hidden grain and begs his father to grind it so they can sleep with full stomachs. But just before the rains finally come, the father does something that seems

cruel and unreasonable: with tears streaming down his face, he takes that precious grain, walks into the cracked, barren field, and throws it into the dirt, believing in the harvest to come. African pastors point to Psalm 126 and say, "Brothers and sisters, this is God's law of the harvest: those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy." In evangelism, we often sow the gospel in hard soil, with tears, sacrifice, and what the world calls "unreasonable" effort, but we do it because we believe God has promised a harvest. And when a sinner repents and believes, the gratitude that wells up in our hearts is like that family dancing around full granaries: deep joy that could only come because someone was willing to "sow in tears."

EXEGETICAL:

Need: Reception of the proclaimed gospel message in a hostile environment as a message of divine quality, not of human quality

Subject: Paul and his companions created an environment in which the gospel message could be heard.

Purpose: To return thanks to God for the reception and operation of the gospel among the Thessalonians

Biblical Idea: Paul thanked God for the reception and operation of the gospel message in Thessalonika (1 Thess. 2:13).

Outline: [Context: Acts 5:41–42; 17:1–9; reception pattern in Acts – prayer > proclamation of the gospel > Holy Spirit regenerates > personal faith that comes from hearing > elementary instruction & water baptism > obedient living]

PAUL RETURNED THANKS TO GOD.

καὶ διὰ τούτο

- "And so or And for this reason"
 - It could be inferential from what has been written previously, or as the NET Study Bible notes indicates, it could be transitioning forward to what lies ahead. I believe it is functioning inferentially, not merely to the content of 2:1–12, but connecting us back to Paul's first use of the verb ευχαριστεῖ in 1:2.

ημεῖς ευχαριστούμεν

- "we give thanks"
 - 1st person, plural, present, active, indicative - The present aspect of the verb gives us a front row seat, internal kind of view of Paul's expression of thanksgiving. He's on the ground, looking around him in the mission of Christ, and seeing something in the Thessalonians that causes him to give thanks to God.
 - The action of "giving thanks" is an expression of appreciation for benevolence and blessing, a return of thanks for grace received, and a sacrifice that is pleasing to God.

- This verb is used thirty-nine times in the New Testament. I'll share more about the fruit of my study on this in just a bit.
- It is used three times in 1 Thessalonians (1:2, here, and 5:18). It is used twice in 2 Thessalonians (1:3; 2:13, almost identical in context and proportion in the letters).
- I believe that Paul is picking up in 2:13, what he started to pray in 1:2. Even the adverb "constantly" is repeated. In both contexts, we find the continuation of the description of the Thessalonians initial reception of the word/the gospel and of the imitation-style of obedience exhibited by the Thessalonians. So, what we're saying here is that Paul really hasn't changed topics since 1:2. Up until 2:17, Paul is giving thanks for the Thessalonians' reception of the gospel and for their obedience through imitation. In the midst of his thanksgiving, he takes time to elaborate on the context and circumstances that existed at the time of their initial reception.
- OVERVIEW OF EUCHARISTEO IN 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS
 - **1Th. 1:2** We thank God always for all of you as we mention you constantly in our prayers
 - Paul had made it his habit, and the habit of his companions, to regularly return thanks to God for the local churches serving with him in Christ's great commission. He used his typical phraseology of "making mention," "always/constantly," and "in our prayers."
 - The cause of his gratitude to God for them started with his regular remembrance. The NET Bible uses the word "recall." Gratitude requires taking the time to remember reasons why we should be thankful. One has to take inventory.
 - Paul recalled the Thessalonians' faith, love, and hope. Each of these Christian virtues are attached to head nouns - "work of faith," "labor of love," schedule and "endurance of hope." There are two ways of interpreting the Greek phrases: (1) working faith or faithful work, (2) laboring love or loving labor, (3) enduring hope or hopeful endurance." The difficulty comes with identifying which noun takes on an adjectival nuance, which is why most translations opt for the simple noun-of-noun construction and allow the reader to interpret.
 - I also notice the Paul's focus on the language of a "burden" here. "Work" is the common word for work. "Labor" has a range of meaning that encompasses a state or activity that causes discomfort, distress, and difficulty. "Endurance" has to do with one's capacity to remain under a difficult situation or burden, to hold out, to hold on. These are the things that Paul remembered about the Thessalonians. They caused him to return thanks to God.

- Who are the hard-working, burden-bearing brothers and sisters God has gifted you? Return thanks to God for these warriors!
- **1Th. 2:13** And so we too constantly thank God that when you received God's message that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human message, but as it truly is, God's message, which is at work among you who believe.
 - More on our text for today in a bit.
- **1Th. 5:18** in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
 - The first part of the verse closes three commands that are modified by superlative adverbs - "Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks." Interestingly, the next verse says, "Do not extinguish the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19 NET).
 - The whole paragraph is heavy on commands/exhortations on how to live the Christian life. The superlative adverbs - always, constantly, and everything - followed by the command not to extinguish the Spirit means that there are works, activities, and attitudes with which the Holy Spirit is regularly filling your life. The concept here is simply to yield to him. Don't stop him. Allow him to continually fill your life with rejoicing (joy), prayer (prayerfulness), and returning thanks (gratitude). Verse 20 also fits - he wants to fill your life with the Word of God; don't despise the prophetic Word.
 - The Holy Spirit wants to fill your life with those things that are God's will for you - including the attitude of gratitude and the activity of returning thanks. How are you yielding to or resisting the Holy Spirit's aim for gratitude in your life?
- **2Th. 1:3** We ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith flourishes more and more and the love of each one of you all for one another is ever greater.
- **2Th. 2:13** But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.
 - I've paired these together because of the sense of "oughtness" in both of them. The verb eucharisteo as an infinitive complements the main verb οφειλω (opheilo) both times. Opheilo can convey the idea of being indebted to another person financially, to be obligated to another morally or socially, or to be "constrained by circumstances" (BDAG).
 - The similarities continue: thanks was returned to God in both verses. The superlative "always" was used in both verses to stress the regularity of Paul's obligation to thank God. In both instances, his gratitude is regarding the "brothers and sisters" in the Thessalonian church.

- The exact cause of thanksgiving is the difference between the two verses. In 1:3, Paul returned thanks to God because their faith in Christ and love for one another was flourishing. In 2:13, he does so because God chose the Thessalonians “from the beginning.” Some translations render this “first fruits,” so the “beginning” may be from the earlier-mid part of Paul’s gospel preaching ministry, if this is the right interpretation. This can be dated to right around AD 50 on his second missionary journey. However, the reading “from the beginning” may be stronger and opens up interpretive options, possibly extending back “before the foundations of the world.”
- Therefore, Paul felt obligated to return gratitude to God for his gracious choice of these flourishing followers. For what purpose did God choose them? Paul explained “for salvation,” for deliverance from sin and death in Christ. The means by which God accomplished this salvation was “sanctification.” Christian salvation is sometimes described in three phases: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Here, the second phase received emphasis in Paul’s gratitude, and it is that phase during which God makes the Christian holy and set apart for his purposes. Finally, God’s instruments for bringing this sanctification were (1) the Holy Spirit and (2) faith in the truth (of the gospel). These two are always the instruments by which God brings about the phases of salvation.
- As we can discern, Paul’s gratitude was thoughtful regarding the truth about salvation. It was also thoughtful about God’s work taking place in and through others.
- EXCURSUS ON EUCHARISTEO
 - Top 10 Reasons to Return Thanks to God According to the New Testament
 - Because He gives daily provision, including food.
 - Jesus and Paul *give thanks* for bread and meals (Matt 15:36; John 6:11; Acts 27:35).
 - Because He has given grace in Christ Jesus.
 - Paul *thanks* God for the grace given to believers in Christ (1 Cor 1:4).
 - Because He has qualified believers to share in the inheritance of the saints.
 - Believers are to be *giving thanks* to the Father who has qualified them (Col 1:12).
 - Because He has chosen and saved believers through the gospel.
 - “We ought always to *give thanks* to God for you... because God chose you... for salvation” (2 Thess 2:13).
 - Because He produces faith, love, and endurance in other believers.

- Paul *gives thanks* for faith proclaimed, love increasing, and steadfastness (Rom 1:8; Col 1:3–4; 2 Thess 1:3).
- Because His word is received as His word and works powerfully in believers.
 - Paul constantly *gives thanks* that the Thessalonians received the word of God as God's word (1 Thess 2:13).
- Because He appoints, strengthens, and entrusts His servants with ministry.
 - Paul *thanks* Christ Jesus for strengthening him and appointing him to service (1 Tim 1:12).
- Because He provides co-laborers and encouragers in the gospel.
 - Paul *gives thanks* for Prisca and Aquila, who risked their lives (Rom 16:4), and *thanks* God when he sees the Roman believers and takes courage (Acts 28:15).
- Because He hears prayer and acts in power.
 - Jesus *thanks* the Father for hearing Him before raising Lazarus (John 11:41).
- Because He is Lord God Almighty who takes His great power and reigns.
 - The elders in heaven say, "We *give thanks* to you, Lord God Almighty... for you have taken your great power and begun to reign" (Rev 11:17).
- These texts together show that *εὐχαριστέω* is not occasional but central to New Testament faith: believers are commanded and "ought" to live in continual, Christ-centered thanksgiving to God in every part of life.
- καὶ . . . τῷ Θεῷ αδιαλειπτῶς
 - "also . . . to God constantly"
 - The direction of Paul's thanksgiving is to God.
 - The frequency or manner of his thanksgiving is unceasing. The term is used four times and only in Paul's epistles. It's used once in Romans and three times in 1 Thessalonians. The context of its usage is always in Paul's remembrance of these believers in prayer and thanksgiving and conveys the idea of an unbroken consistency.
 - "And from the tenth mountain, where were trees sheltering certain sheep, they that believed are such as these; bishops, hospitable persons, who gladly received into their houses at all times the servants of God without hypocrisy. [These bishops] at all times without ceasing sheltered the needy and the widows in their ministration and conducted themselves in purity at all times. These [all] then shall be sheltered by the Lord forever. They therefore that have done these things are glorious in the sight of God, and their place is even now with the angels, if they shall continue unto the end serving the Lord" (Shepherd 104:1–3 [AFL-E](#)).

- Remember in 5:17-18 that Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to pray in unbroken consistency and to give thanks in everything. The exhortation and those in the context seems to be part of the Holy Spirit's continuous work in the believers—those things to which we must continually yield and which we must not stop. And so, we have the demonstration of the consistent prayer life of the apostle and the command to imitate this by the apostle.

PAUL EXPLAINED HIS GRATITUDE.

- οὐτι
 - Paul now moves to a subordinate clause in which he will articulate the reason for his unbroken consistent thanksgiving to God.
 - As Paul continued in his letter to the Thessalonian Christians, he wrote to them about another reason he thanked God for them. In addition to their reputation as burden-bearers in the gospel work, Paul remembered their first encounter with the gospel message (λογον). They didn't receive it as a human account of things, but as it genuinely is God's account of Jesus Christ and his cross. This message continued to be at work among them, maturing them into faithful burden-bearing Christians in the gospel ministry.
- παραλαβοντες λογον ακοης παρ'ημων του Θεου
 - "when you received" is an aorist, active, masculine, plural, nominative participle. It is functioning temporally in relation to the main verb, meaning simply that there is a first receiving that precedes the accepting. It also carries an external, rooftop view with regard to aspect, so Paul was looking at the whole situation of the Thessalonians receptivity from a bird's eye view. This first receiving has to do with hearing.
 - "the proclaimed/heard word of God from us" - the construction fits a particular grammatical situation in Greek called **Apollonius' Canon and Corollary to the Canon**. To help, here's a very wooden English translation of these words "word of hearing from us of God." Because "word of hearing" fits this canon and corollary, it is better understood as definite. The word "hearing" specifically makes it more specific and definite. What kind of a word is it? The emphasis here is not on the written word but on "the heard word" or "the proclaimed word." So, let's build that out in translation, now we have "when you received the proclaimed word of God from us" or maybe better still "when you received the proclaimed, divine message from us." Further, we can say that the audible nature of this "word" or "message" and its divine quality define it.

- It appears to be the same "word" as in chapter one—the gospel message that comes not merely in words but also with power, conviction, pure character (1:5) and with joy from the Holy Spirit even in the midst of great affliction (1:6). It is the word of the Lord. Paul and his companions did not deliver the gospel message cloaked in words of flattery, disguised as greed, or corrupted by glory-seeking (2:5). Instead, the apostolic evangelists came to the Thessalonians like family members—like little children (2:7), like mothers (2:7), like fathers (2:11–12).
 - **Little Children:** When the designation is used figuratively, "little children" refers to those in need of the elementary teaching of the Jesus movement.
 - **Nursing Mothers:** The provisions of a nursing mother highlighted here are the sustaining nourishment (Paul often figuratively compares the word of God to "milk.") and the physical presence and warmth.
 - **Fathers:** As fathers, the apostolic team exhorted, encouraged, and affirmed the right way to live in God's kingdom. All three of the verbs in verse 12 carry the idea of feeding, urging, encouraging, and directing.
 - **Family:** Therefore, the apostolic team created a family like atmosphere in which people newly born again in Christ by the Spirit could thrive in their new lives. They provided basic teaching, a healthy and warm environment of nourishment and presence, and gave courage and clarity about how to walk in the newness of life.
 - **EVANGELISM:** This is the kind of environment created by Paul and his team created in Thessalonica in which the Thessalonians **received** the proclaimed word of God from them.
- ενδεξασθε ου λογον ανθρωπον
 - "y'all did not accept a human message"
 - The verb is a 2nd person, plural, aorist middle indicative. As Paul assessed the overall event of the Thessalonian reception of the gospel, he concluded that they approved, received, and bore a conviction to accept the proclaimed word as not a "word of man." This is possible an Attributive Genitive, which highlights the quality of the head noun. That is to say, they did not accept a human-quality-kind-of-word.
 - The verb is used in two other places in the Thessalonian letters 1 Thess. 1:6 and 2 Thess. 2:10.
- αλλα καθως εστιν αληθως λογον θεου
 - This "but" introduces one of the strongest of conjunctive contrasts.
 - The conjunction "just as" subordinates the following comparative clause to the main verb "to accept."

- The comparison follows—it is truly, really, actually, in truth the word of God. Again, the attributive genitive is used here—the "word of God" highlights the divine-quality-kind-of-word. While it could be a simple possessive "God's word," the Attributive Genitive better fits the comparison Paul attempted to make.
- ος και ενεργειται εν υμιν τοις πιστευουσιν
 - The referent of the relative pronoun "which" is "word of God."
 - The conjunction "and, also" coordinates additional information about the "word of God" to what has already been said. Not only did the Thessalonians approve the proclaimed word of the apostles' as the word of God; this same word was in them doing something.
 - The intransitive verb means "to put one's capabilities into work, work, be at work, be active, operate, be effective." It does not require an object on which to exert its action. It is a 3rd person, singular, present, middle, indicative. The word of God is the subject referred to in the relative pronoun. It is the word of God that is active and operating. The location of the word of God's operation was "in you all" namely "in those who believe."
 - Paul correlated receiving the word of God with believing the word of God. The proclaimed gospel found a home in hearts among the Thessalonians. They welcomed and believed the proclaimed gospel. Now, with the gospel internalized, they experienced its operation from within, which we know elsewhere creates a dying and raising kind and quality of life forever. For the reception of the word and for the activity of the word among Thessalonians, Paul and his team gave thanks to God.

TRANSITION: Story of facing hostility at Greenville Ave, Harlem NYC; giving thanks for the many students who listened to the gospel proclaimed. Facing hostility in Dallas on Lower Greenville; giving thanks for those who came later and heard the gospel proclaimed.

THEOLOGICAL:

Timeless Tension: External **hostility** has always challenged the church's creation of environments for gospel proclamation and gospel hearing. A.K.A. The world has been and will always be a hostile place for evangelism. This will not change.

Timeless Purpose: To think in a Christ-centered and apostolic way about our evangelistic predicament.

Timeless Truth: Faithful gospel proclamation always accomplishes God's purposes in Christ **inside** those who hear.

Three Evangelistic Observations from Paul's Missionary Trip to Thessalonika: Acts 17:1–9

- The proclamation of the gospel must be approached **prayerfully**—something heavenly is going to happen.
- The proclaimed gospel may initiate or contribute to a hearer's **progress** in the pattern of reception.
- The proclaimed gospel may **harden** hearer's hearts resulting in an intensified environment of hostility.

TRANSITION: Remember that you are a beneficiary of a generous benefactor. You have received grace and must return thanks. When we proclaim the gospel, our gratitude toward God for his grace is an opportunity for testimony.

Quote from Ministry 127: "Striving to Please the Master" - Reporters pressed outside the violinist's dressing room, waiting to catch a word from the man who had just given the performance of a lifetime. As he emerged from the small room, one reporter asked the question, "Sir, why did you give so many encore performances? You could have stopped after the first and everyone would have been amazed." The violinist stopped and replied, "For the very first time in my career, my master, the one who taught me to play the violin, was in the audience. When I finished my performance, everyone stood except for one person. I played again, and everyone stood to applaud except for him. I continued to play. On the conclusion of the last encore I looked into the seats and I noticed that everyone, including my master, was standing and applauding. It was only then that I was satisfied that I had done a good job."

HOMILETICAL:

Need: Hospitable receptions in a hostile realm

Subject: 3 apostolic essentials for creating hospitable receptions for the gospel in a hostile realm

Purpose: To create ministry momentum that generates an unbroken consistency of thanks to God

Today's Message: Express the thanksgiving that evangelism energizes.

Outline:

Agile **Attitudes** steward the hospitable reception of the gospel in a hostile realm (1 Thess. 2:1-12).

- Practice an enduring proclamation.
- Practice a pure proclamation.
- Practice an elementary proclamation.
- Practice a motherly proclamation.
- Practice a fatherly proclamation.

Magnetic **Movements** advance the hospitable reception of the gospel in a hostile realm toward ministry momentum (Acts 5:41–42; 17:1–9).

- Employ existing hangouts (cultural and religious centers) to have gospel conversations.
- Provide a home that demonstrates hospitality for proclaiming the gospel.
- Identify hearts that confess understanding and operate obediently.
 - The propitiatory death of Christ - Christ died for your sins, according to the scriptures, and he was buried.
 - The regenerating resurrection of Christ - Christ rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures.
 - Do they "see" him?

Perpetual **Praise** results from the hospitable reception of the gospel in a hostile realm (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13).

CLOSING: <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/evangelism.htm> Keepers of the Aquarium Won't Experience the thanksgiving that evangelism energizes!

"In the Great Commission the Lord has called us to be--like Peter--fishers of men. We've turned the commission around so that we have become merely keepers of the aquarium. Occasionally I take some fish out of your fishbowl and put them into mine, and you do the same with my bowl. But we're all tending the same fish."

Why not?

Two reasons: First, sharing the gospel with unbelievers is required for them to be converted to faith in Christ.

Second, you cannot express the gratitude to God that evangelism energizes without sharing the gospel. We miss out on a particular kind of praise and thanksgiving to God when we avoid or neglect evangelism. There is a kind of gratitude that comes with being God's partner in the proclamation of the gospel and witnessing the salvation of souls.