

Gospel-Focused Church

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 Thess 2:9-20 | September 16, 2018

Remember the gospel, *disciple* the church, and *receive* the Word for Jesus is coming back.

Remember

Our passage opens with Paul and his companions asking the church to remember, *you remember, brothers and sisters, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God (2:9)*. What are they to remember? Two things: 1) how they worked to not burden the church, *godly integrity*, and 2) how they proclaimed the gospel of God, *gospel ministry*. Two things: gospel ministry; godly integrity. Now why is *this* important to remember? You may have noticed throughout the letter Paul appeals to *things they already know*: *you yourselves know, brothers and sisters our coming to you was not in vain...but had boldness to declare the gospel (2:1)*; *we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed...we shared the gospel of God (5)*. He's appealing to what they know because they're losing confidence in it. It's why he's saying we didn't come in vain, nor in deceit. So what are they losing confidence in? *the Gospel: they were delivered from the wrath to come and Jesus is coming back to right all wrongs* (an emphasis virtually at the end of every chapter). What should they remember? Delivered from the wrath to come (generates great humility) and Jesus is coming back to right all wrongs (produces inordinate hope). The church was struggling, in particular, with the latter, that Christ would return or had he already returned and left them behind. And there was a group egging that on, trying to get the church to give up *on the gospel*. They even followed Paul from city to city trying to discredit him. The chatter, slander, charges caused the church to question *what they knew to be true*. *Gospel hope, gospel humility; Christ died, Christ is coming back*. The pressure to do this—to abandon gospel hope and gospel humility—might be even greater today. Psychologists talk about **recency bias**; it's a bias when more *recent information* is given greater weight in forming a judgment than earlier information. *So if you go into an interview, you might wait to talk about your best points last because you hope they will tilt the interview in your favor*. Now consider how recency bias works in a 24 hour news cycle, with constant exposure to attention-grabbing headlines, controversial tweets, instant access to a range of opinions. Recency bias gets supercharged, so whatever the latest issue—hurricane threat, Trump tweet, racial discrimination, sexist remark—we get sucked into responding as *if there's no hope*, plunging into cynicism and despair. Or we *react without humility* complaining, gossiping, accusing...and *we forget what we know*. We allow the media to overshadow what we know is true: Jesus delivered *us* from the wrath to come *and* he's coming back to right wrongs. We lose sight of the gospel's hope and humbling effect. So, instead of getting smaller, we grow taller. We form self-righteous opinions and judge those who disagree with us. Or we fade into cynical escapism, as though Christ doesn't care about any of it. Knowing the pressure of outside sources from Timothy's report, Paul writes *to help the church see clearly*, to not be distracted by shooting stars. So he pulls out the telescope to bring the gospel back into focus, and says, "Look, you've got every reason to be *humble*—your evil put Christ on a cross—and every reason to be *hopeful*—Jesus is returning to right all wrongs. But what about so and so? He pulls the telescope back over, trains our attention onto *what we know*: Gospel of God, mentioned five times already, and we're not even to the

end of chapter two. Add in synonyms of the gospel and the number easily doubles. Why? *It's the primary lens. The gospel of God. God's news, his headline, his way of seeing things. He could view us through our most recent sin, but he chooses to see us through the sinlessness of Christ!* That's how we should view one another: "[to the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#)" all of us (1:1); [For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God](#) (1:5). So treat one another, online and in life, they way God has treated you. Loved, pardoned, placed in the Father and the Son. *The gospel should be our primary bias, exercising disproportionate influence over how we respond to one another, and to recent news.* He's *not* saying don't think critically about, sweep everything under the rug, but he is saying deal with one another *as Christ as dealt with you*, in humility and in hope.

Disciple

So *how* do we express this humble hope? Paul says, [For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory](#) (2:11–12). He says he *calls* you into his kingdom and glory, present-tense. God is calling us, now, into his kingdom. And the proof his future kingdom has arrived, the evidence of his coming glory, is how we treat one another: a loving father, a gentle mother (7). Father in two ways. To *exhort* is to challenge someone, to hold them to a standard, to keep in step with what they believe. When I was in my early twenties, mucking about with sex, my father pulled me aside and said, Son, when are you going to keep the integrity of God's Word? Changed the course of my life. When you see someone mucking about in the headlines, growing taller, pull them aside and exhort them to remember they were delivered from the *wrath* to come, to have humble hope. Exhortation is so important Paul [sent Timothy back to establish and exhort in the faith](#) (3:2). To *encourage* is to come alongside, to comfort even, to put an arm around, you can do this. 5:15, *encourage the fainthearted*. Earlier in the passage Paul compares his team to a gentle **mother** with nursing child. What gentle mothers do? They conform their lives to the needs of their child. They sacrifice sleep, sanity, freedoms, all to nurture life in that child. And they do it tenderly, not begrudgingly. There are times to conform your busy life to the pace of a sufferer, a struggler, to be patient, gentle, and kind. When someone is struggling, or crushed in spirit, you don't exhort them, at least not first, you encourage them. You might say, I'm so sorry; I know its hard. Pray for them. But the child also needs a father, to exhort. How are we doing at this? I think we've got a lot of brothers and sisters running around *that could be spiritual mothers and fathers*. Are you exhorting, encouraging, nurturing on a regular basis? Or are you just taking? doing the bare minimum? You say I'm no Paul. I don't have enough wisdom. Paul had just met Timothy (act 16), and here he sends Timothy back to the Thessalonians to do what? Establish and exhort. He was a relatively new Christian! But weren't they professionals? That's not how Paul saw it, "[And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all](#) (5:14). We urge *you brothers*, City Lifers, to disciple, admonish, encourage, nurture, be patient with all. This is baseline Christianity. Men discipling men, women discipling women. Mentoring, caring for one another. Who do you seek out? Let me show you the motivation: [To walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory](#). The reason you should disciple, mother and father, is to live up to your name as Christian, to be worthy of God, you pull out the telescope and bring the gospel into focus for others. Because you want to be evidence of the

glory to come, to show people around the kingdom of God. Ask someone out for coffee, start a FC by reading GCD, step up to lead a new CG.

Repeat

Paul wants us to remember the primacy of the gospel, disciple one another, and receive the Word: *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers* (2:13). If you're receiving the Word from this church, taking in the gospel from others, then honor that deposit by allowing it to work in you, even today. Maybe its recency bias, maybe discipleship, but allow it to work! Remember the primacy of the gospel, to disciple one another, and to cherish the Word of God. Now notice he didn't say here's some pithy sayings, five best practices, sage wisdom. Paul thanked God because the church received the gospel *as the Word of God* not as the word of men. This means we labor, not just to see people *through* the Word (humble and hopeful), but to counsel people *with* the Word. FC/CG/. This week someone asked me for advice on a business dilemma. It would have been much easier to just tell them what I would do. But I wanted them to think about what God would have them do, so I brought up a passage of Scripture and we talked about how it may or may not apply. Don't try to impress people with your words, let God's words impress people. Paul says the word "worked." It's performative, alive, able to encourage, comfort, transform. Let the Word do the work. Why? Why *remember the gospel, disciple the church, receive the Word? For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy* (19-20). He's saying do it all because it makes you happy, *because it brings you true joy*. You'll never regret spending your life investing in others. You will regret spending too much time at work and play. What will be your crown of boasting before Jesus when he returns? Paul says, I'll cast a crown of disciples, men and women I've focused onto the gospel, exhorted, encouraged, and nurtured, counseled the Word. Pursue your joy in others as you wait for the Son; he is coming. Remember the gospel, disciple others, receive the Word.