

In the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:1–8, 18–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15) seed (the Word of God) is sown on different soils (differing hearts). Seed sown on the good and noble heart produces a great crop. The Thessalonian believers exemplified this fourth soil. The word was at work in them producing spiritual fruit even in trials, distinguishing them from hardened, unbelieving soil (vv 15–16). The apostolic team was especially thankful to God that the Thessalonians had received and embraced God’s word and for the evidence of it in their endurance of suffering. The logical process in verses 13–16 reveals the living word of God sown on good and noble hearts.

I. *The first foundational step: the divine proclamation was received and embraced.*

1. *The divine message was proclaimed.*

- a. The message is clearly stated as divine, i.e. from God, and by contrast, not the word of men but the word of God. This places on the believer the mandate to assure that what we claim and proclaim is truly the word of God.
- b. The message they received was an oral message, distinguishing it from the actions which the Thessalonians had observed (2:1–12), and reminding them that it was heralded as God’s message, not the creation of the missionaries.

Proclamation was and is essential. The seed must be sown for a crop to be harvested. The good lives of the missionary team and of believers today were and are important, but are totally ineffective of themselves to produce spiritual fruit in the lives of those who observe them. The word of God, the gospel, must be proclaimed.

2. *The divine message was received.*

- a. Just as students receive instruction from a teacher, the Thessalonians received the gospel message. But just as students might understand and reproduce the teaching they receive, but not accept it, the word “receive” here does not necessarily mean that they embraced that teaching. Remember those disciples of Jesus who heard His teaching, knew what Jesus had said, but found it “hard” and turned away (John 6:66).

3. *The divine message was embraced.*

- a. However, the Thessalonians did indeed “accept” the message, emphasizing a personal welcoming of the message.
- b. “Embrace” pictures well their response, as one would welcome a friend. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven.

Messengers may proclaim the word, but the listener must respond to it and embrace it. The messenger cannot change the soil of the heart, but must rely upon the effectiveness of God’s word to produce fruit.

II. *The second step: the implanted word produced the fruit of endured suffering.*

1. *The implanted word powerfully acts.*

- a. God’s word is active and working as stated elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23; Romans 1:16; James 1:21).
- b. The “crop” in the Thessalonians was spiritual fruit (cf. 1:3) and, especially here, endured suffering (cf. 1:6; 2:14).

It is implied that God’s Word, Scripture, is essential for eternally significant ministry. The outstanding attitude and behavior (2:1–12) were a vindication for Paul, but not that which God used to work in the hearts of the Thessalonians. The word is at work, so sow the word.

2. *The implanted word often precipitates suffering.*

Accepting the word resulted in persecution. Paul had warned them of this (3:3) and Jesus warned of it (John 15:18–21). The word brings about real change which distinguishes the believer as a new creation and which draws persecution from enemies of Christ.

3. *The implanted word produces the ability to endure suffering.*

- a. “Suffer” implies a continued experience in which one must hold out (cf. Hebrews 5:8). Hence, they “endured suffering” (v 14, NASB).
- b. Comparison with the Judean churches yields certain implications. (1) The same seed produces the same fruit, endured suffering. (2) The same seed produces the same crop consistently, as from the start. (3) The same seed unifies, the word of God producing churches of God in Christ (cf. 1:1). (4) The same seed sustains – the Judean churches still lived despite persecution from the start.

There is no guarantee against persecution or even death. But there is the encouragement, that the believer, in whom the word is at work, can endure.

God’s word is living and active. It is the seed that needs to be sown. It is the seed that is at work in the heart. It is the seed that will produce a great crop in the good and noble heart. It is the seed that produces endurance in suffering. Sow this seed. Learn it. Embrace it. Use it.