1 Thessalonians 2:13 – For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. NASU

A. For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us – Paul now shifts his attention from his own ministry to the Thessalonians themselves and how they received it. “For this reason” he says, “we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us.” Notice here that Paul is “constantly” thanking “God” for how the Thessalonians received “the Word of God.” This shows the nature of divine calling even further, for Paul certainly does not pat them on the back for such wisdom as they possessed of their own to believe, or for being such clever folks as to listen to God. No indeed, He thanks God for powerfully working in them conviction concerning His own “word.” Further, see here, the saving message of the Gospel that Paul preached to them was “the word of God.” How important it is for us to understand the divine and supernatural origin of the Christian Gospel. It is not man’s cleverly invented story but rather the very “word of God” Himself, who alone can supernaturally save us by a supernatural work of regeneration.

Christian salvation is not simply a mental assent to certain ideas or historical facts, but rather being born again by the power of God’s Spirit which is a supernatural miracle of God’s doing.

John 3:3-5 - 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. NASB

1 Corinthians 2:14 - 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. NASB

2 Corinthians 5:17-19 - 17 Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, NASB

B. you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God – The point here could not be more clear. The message of Christianity is a supernatural message, “the word of God,” from outside of the earthly dimension that comes from God Himself and from eternity where God dwells. It is not just some human wisdom made up by some self-righteous soul, but it is God’s heavenly plan to deal with man’s sin. It is a saving enterprise which issues forth from God Himself and accomplishes exactly what God sent it forth for. This is how Isaiah describes it.

Isaiah 55:11 - 11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. NASB

Paul is here commending the Thessalonians for accepting it as such, he states, “you accepted it not as the word of men.” This indicates a fundamental issue about the Christian Faith, that being, we understand the message of Christianity to be of divine and supernatural origin, and all true Christians accept it as such, “the word of God.” This why the Bible is ever and always under attack from the secular culture. If they can discredit the message as somehow being less than divine, they are also free from the curses that are written therein for those who reject it. See here one definite mark that distinguishes a true Christian from a mere professor, they hold the Bible in such high esteem that they see it “for what it really is, the word of God.” Further, those who see it as “it really is the word of God,” are also persuaded then that it is to be fully obeyed. If it truly is a message from God, it ought to be heeded, lest God be found in contempt toward us for our belittling of His holy Word.

C. which also performs its work in you who believe – It is because God had so moved in their hearts as to give them a witness of the divine origin of the message, that the powerful work of the Spirit had begun in their midst. God’s Word is of such wonder working power that it “performs its work in you who believe.” This is to say, the word “works” in those who “receive” and
“accept” it, giving proof that they “believe” what it says. Consider that the Word “performs its work,” that is the work of the Word “in you who believe.” When the Word is combined with faith, it powerfully “works.” MacArthur comments, “God’s Word always performs His purposes in the lives of all who believe (Isa 55:11). Scripture works on behalf of believers in a multitude of ways; it saves them (James 1:18, 1 Pet 1:23); it sanctifies them (John 17:17); it matures them (1 Pet 1:22); it frees them (John 8:31-32); it perfects them (2 Tim 3:16-17); it counsels them (Ps 119:24); it builds them up (Acts 20:32); it ensures their spiritual success (Josh 1:8-9, Ps 1:2-3); and it gives them hope (Ps 119:147, Acts 20:32).” Consider how profound this thought really is. That God Himself is powerfully working in those who believe His supernatural Word which came from His mouth. Here see the reason for the tenacity of Christian believers holding to the profession of their faith even at great peril or fiery testing. Christians are so persuaded that God has spoken, and their hearts have been so powerfully changed, that they won’t let go of their faith, even if it means certain death. They realize that they ought to obey God rather than men, for He holds their eternal soul in His hand. And here in this context, Paul goes on to discuss how they “endured sufferings” from their countrymen. Yet, because God’s Word had so powerfully worked in them, they would not be discouraged or detracted from not only believing, but also “sounding forth” the message in “every place,” v-1:8.

1 Thessalonians 2:14 – 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, NASU

A. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea – Here see that they look like the genuine Christians who were first powerfully transformed by the Gospel when it was first preached in Jerusalem by the Apostles. In the face of severe persecution, they held tenaciously to their faith, even if it meant “enduring sufferings.” Consider the exhortation in the book of Hebrews to the Judean Christians and how remarkably similar their situation was to the Thessalonians.

Hebrews 10:32-39 - 32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37 For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. 38 But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. NASB

Nevertheless, these Thessalonians, “became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.” They were willing no matter the cost to hold on to their faith, even if they were to face severe persecution for it. They, just like the Jerusalem church, instead of being stamped out by religious persecution, thrived in the midst of it. This has long been the case in point, that whenever the church is persecuted, it thrives and spreads in strong degree. So came that famous quote from Tertullian, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

B. for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen. “Here we learn for sure that The Thessalonians had certainly been persecuted in no small way, but instead “you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen.” Here Paul states that they faced the “same sufferings” in Macedonia even as the Jerusalem church “did from the Jews.” We see the suffering of the “churches of Judea” was severe from the record of Acts and of the passage in Hebrews we just looked at. But notice here that this suffering came from “your own countrymen,” whereas theirs was “from the Jews.”