

We are currently in a study of 2 Thessalonians.

This morning we are looking at 2:13-17.

Please take your Bibles and turn to 2
Thessalonians chapter 2.

Having completed our look at coming apostasy, the man of sin, and the Restrainer, Paul now concludes his correction to the Thessalonians with one final charge.

Beginning at verse 13, Paul says, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were

taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

As we have been looking at chapter 2, we have been learning that the main thought of this chapter has been *correction*.

In verses one and two, we were told that the Thessalonians had believed the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (v.1) and “the day of the Lord [had] come” (v.2).

But from verses 3-12, Paul has been correcting this misunderstanding by stating that three things have to occur first: the apostasy (v.3), the

revealing of Antichrist (v.3), and the removal of the One who is retraining him (vv.6-7).

Then, according to verse 8, “that lawless one will be revealed.”

And after he is revealed, the church is raptured and the day of the Lord's wrath begins.

Now as Paul has set out to correct the Thessalonians thinking, he has given us insight into this period which is also known as the seventieth week of Daniel mentioned in Daniel 9:24-27.

Paul has given us a description of Antichrist (v. 3), his revelation (v.3), his attitude (vv.4-5), his restraint (vv.6-7), his end (v.8), and his power (vv.9-12).

Now as we come to the close of this chapter,
Paul makes one final statement.

It begins with in verse 13 with...

A CONTRAST (vv.13-14)

To what he has been saying concerning the three
events that lead up to the coming of Christ and
the day of the Lord.

He begins with one word...

“But”

The contrast begins with this one word and
builds off of verses 10-12 of "those who perish."

Paul says that “God will send upon them a
deluding influence so that they will believe what
is false, in order that they all may be judged

who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.”

“But” (v.13) or “on the other hand” we should always give thanks to God for you.”

Here he is contrasting the redeemed with the unredeemed.

In contrast to the unredeemed, who refuse to love and obey the truth, are those who willingly do both; in contrast to those whom God judges are those He redeems; in contrast to those who believe Satan’s lies are those who believe God’s truth; in contrast to those who follow Antichrist are those who follow Christ.¹

This contrast led Paul and his companions to give thanks to God for them.

¹ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 286.

They were "*brethren beloved by the Lord*" who were lovers of the truth.

They were not those who were perishing or those who would experience that deluding influence to believe the lie of the Antichrist.

This caused Paul and his companions to give thanks to God.

If you'll notice the first part of verse 13 is identical with 1:3 which says, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren."

In chapter 1, he was thankful to God "because [their] faith [was] greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of [them] toward one another [grew] ever greater" (1:3).

Further, they had “perseverance and faith in the midst of all [their] persecutions and afflictions which [they] endured” (1:4).

But the reason for the Thessalonians behavior is made more clear now in 2:13-14.

Where did their faith come from?

How did their faith grow?

How did their love for each other increase?

Where did they get this “perseverance”?

All of these questions are answered in verse 13 where he gives them and us more information as to the basis of his thanksgiving.

Both phrases in 1:3 and 2:13 begin with “We ought” or “we should” and mean “to owe.”

Just a couple word variations in English but its the same words in the Greek.

The words “ought” and “should” is the Greek word *opheilo*.

This word is used with the same Greek construction as a present, active, indicative, verb that is in the 1st person plural.

Breaking that down, means, the present tense indicates that Paul is saying his thanksgiving to God for them is continual. It is an action in process or a state of being with no assessment of the action’s completion.²

To say it is in the active voice is to say that Paul and his companions are performing this action---they are the ones giving thanks.

To use the indicative mood is to say this is something that is really happening. It’s not made up.

² Michael S. Heiser, *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Logos Bible Software, 2005; 2005).

So Paul is saying he and his companions were truly giving thanks for them, first as a debt they owed to God, and second because the work of God in their salvation.

Again he uses the endearing term “brethren” (adelphos) and this time adds “beloved by the Lord.”

This again presents a contrast to the unbelievers in verse 10-12 who “did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (v.10).

God does not refer to the world by the same terms.

No where does He say they are “beloved by the Lord.”

It is true that God loves the world but not in the same way that He loves His own.

So, Paul is saying he and his companions were paying their debt to God by giving thanks for them but they were also thankful for what God did in bringing them salvation.

In chapter 1 they were thankful because of their growing faith and love and perseverance.

Now it's "because God has chosen [them] from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (v.13).

The Thessalonians would not have had the faith, love or perseverance if it wasn't for God choosing them "from the beginning."

Nor would they have had this if it wasn't for the gospel Paul preached.

Paul said in Romans 10:17, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

This is not just any word as the context reveals but the “good news” (v.15) of “Christ.”

“The word of Christ” is a specific speech about Christ.

That specific speech is the gospel.

Faith is not activated by any other speech but the gospel.

The idea of God choosing them from the beginning is not Paul’s first mention of this.

In his first letter he said he was “constantly bearing in mind [their] work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord

Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice for you” (1:3-4).

God’s work of salvation began with His sovereign, uninfluenced, undeserved love. That love was the basis for His election of believers (Eph. 1:4–5).

God’s electing love is not conditioned on any merit in its recipients, as Moses reminded Israel: “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples” (Deut. 7:7).

Flowing out of God’s predetermined love is His sovereign choice of believers, whom He *has chosen ... from the beginning for salvation.*

God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4); He “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim. 1:9).

The redeemed are those whose names were “written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Rev. 13:8; *cf.* 17:8).

For that reason, the New Testament commonly refers to believers as the “elect” (Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Rom. 8:33) or the “chosen” (Matt. 22:14; Rom. 11:7; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 that God’s sovereign election of believers becomes

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

operative in their lives through *sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

Sanctification is the work of the Spirit that sets believers apart from sin to righteousness (cf. Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Peter 1:2).

This begins at salvation and includes a total transformation, so that the believer is born again (John 3:3–8) and becomes a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

This doesn't mean believers do not sin. But it does ensure that those set apart from sin to God will lead lives of progressive sanctification, of increasing holiness toward Christlikeness (John 17:17; Rom. 6:1–22; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16–25; Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:9–20; 1 Thess. 4:3–4; 5:23; 1 Peter 1:14–16; 1 John 3:4–10).

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

Paul ends verse 13 with the human factor in God's sovereign, loving election and regeneration.

He says *and faith in the truth*.

Salvation is “by grace ... through faith” (Eph. 2:8).

It is those who “believe in the Lord Jesus [who] will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

To the Romans Paul wrote, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:9–10).

The truth that salvation is by faith in the true gospel permeates the New Testament.

We hear it in passages like Mark 1:15; John 1:12; 3:15–16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; Acts 10:43; Rom. 1:16; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 1:9; 1 John 5:1.

The Holy Spirit regenerates those who hear and believe the truth and He does that by granting them repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25) and the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8–9).

Paul tells us how all this happens in verse 14.

He says, *“It was for this He called you through our gospel.”*

That phrase refers, as always in the New Testament epistles, to God’s effectual call of

believers to salvation (e.g., Rom. 1:6, 7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 24, 26; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 4:1, 4).

When God calls the sinner by His Spirit, that gracious call of the Holy Spirit is irresistible (Rom. 8:30).

Paul said the gospel is not merely words and facts but “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

All of those gospel realities lead to the ultimate goal of God’s redemptive plan—that believers *may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. 1:10, 12).

That firm statement of the security of salvation reveals that God loved, chose, called, and transformed believers for the purpose of eternally reflecting the glory of Christ to them

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

and through them (cf. 1 John 3:1–2; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:42–49; Phil. 3:21).

Since no purpose of His can be thwarted (Job 42:2), nothing can separate believers from His saving love (Rom. 8:35–39).

Based on this sovereign scheme, there was no need for the Thessalonians to be insecure about their salvation, anxious about the Lord’s return, or fearful that they were in the Day of Judgment of the ungodly.

They, like all believers, were not destined for judgment but for glory, for “God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9).³

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

³ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 286-88.

Based upon this or as Paul says in verse 15, “So then, brethren,” he launches into...

A COMMAND (vv.15-17)

The command is to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”

Paul gave similar exhortations to the Corinthians (1 Cor.15:58), the Ephesians (Eph. 6:11), and the Philippians (Phil.4:1).

He wanted the Thessalonians not to be weak or vacillating but to hold their spiritual ground and keep their grip on the truth.

Specifically, the apostle urged them *to hold to the traditions which they were taught.*⁴

⁴ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 288.

The Greek word translated
“traditions” (paradosis) comes from para,
“beside” and didomi, “give over.”

It literally means “things handed down.”

The word itself points only to transmission: the
things given or handed over from teacher to
pupil. ⁵

It implies on the part of a teacher that he is not
expressing his own ideas, but is *delivering* or
handing over (παράδιδωμι) a message received
from some one else. ⁶

In this context, it is referring here to divine
revelation whether “by word of mouth or by
letter.”

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937). 443.

⁶ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002). 2 Th 2:15.

Paul said in 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.”

The Thessalonians were to hold fast to what God had handed down, both orally and in writing, through Paul and the other apostles.

Now he concludes in verses 16-17 with...

A CLOSING PRAYER (vv.16-17)

He prays, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

The exhortation to “stand firm and hold to the teachings” received from the apostles (2:15) is followed by a prayer requesting divine encouragement and assistance for the Thessalonians that they might do this very thing.⁷

To stop being alarmed or believing false reports of the rapture and day of the Lord but to “stand firm.”

They could not do this apart from God’s power, so Paul’s prayer is for God Himself to give them “eternal comfort and good hope by grace” and to “comfort and strengthen [their] hearts in every good work and word.”

⁷ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 258.

CONCLUSION

When you have been given misleading information, it not only breaks your composure but also your hope.

The Thessalonians had believed the raptured occurred and they were living in the day of the Lord's wrath.

As demonstrated here, that event has not occurred and they needed to continue to stand firm to the end.

This passage has demonstrated to us that the only way to correct error is with truth.

The truth empowered by the Holy Spirit comforts and strengthens hearts.

Let's make sure that's what we pass on to each other and those we come in contact.

Before we pray, let me ask, "Are you one who is beloved by the Lord?"

Have you repented and placed your faith in the truth of the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ?

The only way to avoid the lie of the Antichrist and his deluding influence is to repent and receive the gospel now.

I urge you to deny yourself now.

Let's pray.

Stand Firm and Hold the Traditions
2 Thessalonians 2:13-17
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LIFE APPLICATION

What does it mean to be bound to give thanks?

What is tradition?

What traditions are we to pass on?