

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

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The Thessalonians should remember God's love for them, how He chose them to be saved from sin and death, and to become Christlike through obedience and faith. As believers in Christ, they are His children, and brothers of Paul. But they will share in Jesus's glory as rulers over earth when He returns only if they stand firm and stick to Paul's teaching.

Paul has just explained to the Thessalonians that they had not missed out on Jesus's return to earth, nor had the Day of the Lord happened yet. Several things will happen before the Day of the Lord, namely something Paul calls the "apostasy," where someone known as "the man of lawlessness" and "the son of destruction" will "be revealed," someone "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god"; he will take "his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (1 Thessalonians 2:3-4). But none of that had (or has) happened yet, so the Thessalonians should take comfort that they can still look forward to Jesus's return to meet them in the air before these awful things take place (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Paul now encourages the Thessalonians: *But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord.* Paul is thankful to God for these *brethren beloved by the Lord*. Someone is trying to overturn their faith by saying Jesus came back and they missed it. Apparently even claiming to speak to them on behalf of Paul himself (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul reminds his spiritual children in Christ that they are *brethren*, meaning they are in the family of God with Paul. This is because those who have believed are given the gift of eternal life (John 3:14-16). The gifts of God cannot be revoked (Romans 11:29).

But God has more in store for the Thessalonians. God desires they also be sanctified in their walk with Him. Being justified in the presence of God is freely given for all who receive it (Romans 5:15-19). The free gift given by God results in justifying those who believe in the presence of God. God gives believers a new nature. But it is up to each believer whether to walk in their new nature, walking in the Spirit, or to continue to walk in the old man, the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26).

Paul asserts to the Thessalonians that his gratitude is *because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth*. In this case, the *salvation* Paul is speaking of refers to the Thessalonians being delivered from sin in the flesh, their old man, to walk in *sanctification by the Spirit*. To be sanctified is to live set apart from sin and the world. This requires that we choose to walk in *faith* and *in the truth* that God's ways are for our best. The world constantly deceives, claiming that sin is in our true best interest. But sin always leads to an adverse consequence which the Bible categorizes as "death" (Romans 6:23; James 1:14-16). Death involves separation; when we choose sin we are separated from walking in the ways of the Spirit, which lead to life, and our best interest.

The Thessalonians were chosen by God to be sanctified, to live set apart from the world by living lives of faithful obedience to God. *It was for this He called you through our gospel*. The word

gospel means “good news.” Paul is adamant throughout his writings that the good news of Christ is that we can both receive the free gift of being justified in His sight, as well as receiving a great reward for walking faithfully, if we persevere in walking *by the Spirit* both in *faith and in the truth*.

When we who have been born again walk *by the Spirit* both in *faith and in the truth*, it allows us to receive the great reward, *that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Because Jesus learned obedience, even to death on the cross, His name was lifted above every name (Philippians 2:5-11). He was given authority over all the earth (Matthew 28:18). He was rewarded by being granted to sit on the throne of His Father, as a God-man. Jesus invites all who have believed to “overcome” and learn obedience, and offers to share that *glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* with all who walk in *sanctification of the Spirit*.

Paul is reaffirming the Thessalonians’ identity in Christ, that they were picked by God to be reconciled to Him and live holy lives. That is a reality they were given, that cannot be taken from them. Now, since they are rooted in Christ, they can tap into God’s power to walk in His ways, in *sanctification of the Spirit*, and continue to grow and mature in Him.

Which is why Paul writes, *So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught* by Paul. The word translated *traditions* indicates in context the instructions Paul provided about what is true, and what is in their true best interest. Paul desires they follow the instructions he gave to them, *whether by word of mouth or by letter from us*. This reinforces what Paul has already asserted, that these two letters to the Thessalonians affirm and are completely consistent with what he taught them while living among them in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4).

He is urging them to *stand firm* in these teachings, to *hold* onto their identity, and to *stand firm* in what he *taught* them, the instruction he gave them. Paul points to himself as the authority they should listen to, his *word of mouth* or a *letter from* him, along with this letter’s co-authors Silas and Timothy (2 Thessalonians 1:1). This is because in both Thessalonian epistles, Paul has had to clean up deceptions and confusion which the Thessalonians had written to him about. There was clearly some misleading influence in Thessalonica which kept attempting to overthrow their understanding of Christ’s return, leading some to stop trying to live sanctified lives, and to live without purpose (2 Thessalonians 3:6,11).

Paul finishes this encouragement by writing, *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*. Paul’s hope is that since they have had their incorrect understanding fixed, have been restored to understanding what is true, have been encouraged that God has *chosen* them *for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit* and by *faith in the truth*, they can *stand firm*.

They can now follow Paul’s *traditions* (teaching), thereby experiencing *eternal comfort and good hope*. Following the ways of the world leads to disappointment, loss, anxiety, and emptiness. Paul desires his disciples to follow the ways of God. That will bring them trouble in this life, but *eternal comfort*, knowing they took full advantage of their opportunity to know God by faith. Instead of living in the hopelessness of the world, they can live in *good hope* through

God's *grace* and *comfort* even in this life. Their *comfort* can rest in the *hope* we have in Christ's promises. We have a *Father, who has loved us*. Our eternal *Father* wants what is best for us, even as He desired what was best for His own Son. Paul wants the Thessalonians to see this true perspective, and hold firm to the true path to gain the most from life.

Paul believes now that God will *strengthen* their *hearts* in all that they say and do, *in every good work and word*, now that they have been reminded of the truth. He expects that having been reminded by the truth, they will follow the truth, as they have before. The strength to live a life pleasing to God comes through the resurrection power of the indwelling Spirit of God. When we tap into that strength, we have the power to do *every good work*. God gives us the wisdom to speak every good *word*, as well. By living out their sanctification, the Thessalonians can *gain* the amazing reward of sharing in *the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* when He returns (2 Timothy 2:12, 4:8, 1 Peter 5:4).

Biblical Text

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. ¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.