

Message #9

II Thessalonians 2:13-17

If we were to sum up the political, economic and social situation today in one word—the word I would pick would be “unstable.” Our government is unstable. Our economy is unstable. Our housing market is unstable. Most people are unstable. Most people have unstable character and unstable convictions.

God does not want His people unstable. In fact, He wants His people to reflect His stability to this unstable world. He does not want His people blown this way and that way by false winds of doctrine. He wants us standing strong and standing firm. This is certainly true when it comes to our knowledge of what will happen in the future. God’s people should have a confidence that they have a relationship with God that guarantees they will not ever see the time of wrath.

I want us to carefully observe the first word in your English Bibles of **verse 13**—“but” (δε). This is the sharpest contrasting conjunction that there is in the Greek language. When Paul uses it here he is using it in direct contrast to the people who are blinded by God in the Tribulation. **In sharp contrast to the eternal damnation that awaits unbelievers in the Tribulation, “we” are destined to receive eternal salvation that awaits believers in the Grace Age.**

The pronoun “we” refers to the believers in the Grace Age who sit in direct contrast to the “they” that refers to the unbelievers who are in the Tribulation. Paul knew that believers would never experience the Tribulation so in sharp contrast to that group, he wanted the Thessalonians to realize that he continually thanked God for them.

They would not be in the Tribulation because they had a great relationship with God. These believers were brothers in Christ who were “beloved by the Lord.” The participle “beloved” is present tense, meaning the believers at this church were continually loved by the Lord.

This is so important—God continually loves His family and He will not ever put His family in the Tribulation period that is specifically designed to pour out His wrath. You would not do that to your family and He will not do it to His family.

These verses have been called “a system of theology in miniature.” This is one of the most profound and concise doctrinal portions of Pauline theology that is found anywhere in the Bible.

IN CONTRAST TO THE PEOPLE WHO WILL NEVER BE SAVED IN THE TRIBULATION, PAUL WANTED THE BELIEVERS AT CHURCH TO KNOW THAT HE WAS OBLIGATED TO ALWAYS GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THEM BECAUSE THEY ARE FOREVER SAVED, IN WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Paul never worried about these believers being in the Tribulation. He did not have to warn them or threaten them, he could always thank God for them and in this section he specifically spells out the reasons why:

REASON #1 – Because God has chosen you for salvation. **2:13a**

Get this theological point in your mind because this is the truth; the only reason we are saved is because God chose us. The verb chose is aorist middle. What that means is at a specific point or moment of time (aorist tense), God, in and of Himself (middle voice) chose the person to salvation. The basic idea behind the verb “choose” is to select something and take it.

To put this into an illustration, you would specifically select something you want and then you take it. You specifically choose something in and of yourself and take it for yourself. That is exactly what God did with each of us. **God took a personal interest in you and He specifically chose you. It was all of His initiative.** We may praise God for that.

When God chose to save us, it was not because he saw something in us that He didn't see in some other sinner. In fact, in my case I was such a vile sinner; He could have selected a little more respectable sinner if His choice was based on value. But the truth is He simply decided to sovereignly choose and save us out of all the masses of humanity and He decided that we would be the recipients of His grace.

Not only did Paul want them to know that God chose them, but He chose them “from the beginning.”

Some believe this refers to the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel in Thessalonica. However, if Paul would have meant that, he would have specifically added the words “he chose you from the beginning of our preaching of the gospel.” He refers to his preaching later, but he does not say it here.

When we track this matter, “from the beginning,” through the writings of Paul it is clear that he means from “eternity past” (I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2). The election of God to salvation was no spur of the moment decision. God decided that the person would be born into His universe and then He decided before the foundation of the world that He was going to track that person down and save them.

Now I think the actual word “from the beginning” is significant because it has the idea of “first fruits” in view (*απαρχη*). This means different things in different contexts. **The common denominator is that the first fruits are something God does for the first time.** It can refer to God saving someone in a specific area for the first time (I Cor. 16:15; Rom. 16:5). It can refer to the Grace Age church, the first to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:23). It also can refer to the “first fruits” of the nation Israel, who have believed on Jesus Christ (Rev. 14:4) during the Tribulation.

I think the answer is found in the “first fruits” discussion in I Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-52 in a context that specifically has to do with the resurrection of the dead in Christ at the Rapture of the Church. God is going to have a rich “first fruits” harvest at the Rapture of the Church.

In other words, Paul can always thank God for the grace believers because the Church Age will end at the Rapture, which guarantees they will not go into the Tribulation.

This is the “first fruits” of the prophetic program of God. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have nothing to fear concerning the future. The fact that God chose you guarantees a great ending.

Now one other theological point we want to make concerning the fact that God chose us. We must not make the fatal mistake of assuming that since God chose us, He did not choose someone else. The fact is we don’t know. Our job is to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world and we have no idea what God will do when we proclaim this.

REASON #2 – Because God has sanctified you by His Spirit. **2:13b**

The word “sanctify” is a word that means to “set apart” something unto God. This is a perfect passive participle. What this means is that there was a point in time when the Holy Spirit set us apart and we continue to be set apart to the present time and on into the future time.

There is positional sanctification—the moment one believes one is forever set apart as a child of God. There is progressive/practical sanctification—the more we are developing in the Word of God, we are progressing more and more as one who has practically been set apart unto God. There is ultimate sanctification—we will be with the Lord set apart unto Him forever.

Now there is a debate over whether or not this is talking about positional sanctification or practical sanctification. **We believe it is positional by virtue of the passive participle.** In practical sanctification, we are involved in the action, but in positional sanctification, God is the one performing the saving action and we are the recipients of it.

The actual process of how God sets us apart positionally (and also practically) is a process wrought by the Holy Spirit. As one hears the truth, the Holy Spirit produces faith and that is what saves and that is what sanctifies. So when God chooses one to salvation, He uses His Spirit and His truth to produce faith. After one is saved, the same is true. He uses His Spirit and His truth to produce faith.

Notice carefully when the Holy Spirit is doing His sanctifying work He will produce a faith that comes by hearing the truth of the Word of God. When the Pauline grace Gospel is accurately taught, it is a non-works faith Gospel. In fact, people will realize they cannot be saved by their works. They will realize they may only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

REASON #3 – Because God has called you. **2:14**

Now this again reinforces the fact that just as God will one day sovereignly delude unbelievers, in sharp contrast he has sovereignly saved believers.

Our entire salvation experience is totally and completely a work of God. It is God who chose us. It is God who sanctifies us and it is God who calls us.

The aorist tense of the verb “called” indicates there is a specific moment of time or point of time when God summoned us and invited us to become part of His family (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 228).

Paul carefully presents how the process works. God calls through the presentation of what he calls “our gospel.” Do not overlook this very important point. **God saves people through a proper presentation of the Pauline Gospel of grace.**

In other words, true salvation will be wrought through the true Pauline grace Gospel presentation. The more we understand of Galatians and Romans, the more we will grasp the grace Gospel. The more we grasp of the grace Gospel, the better equipped we are to communicate it and when we communicate it accurately, God saves people.

I am convinced that no person will accomplish much of anything evangelistically until they understand Paul’s grace Gospel. When I was first exposed to it back in the early 1980’s, it changed my whole witnessing tactics. When you grasp Pauline grace and communicate the Pauline grace Gospel, God saves people.

Now the calling of God guarantees that you will gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, when you believe on Jesus Christ, you are not destined for the Tribulation; you are destined to gain the glory of Jesus Christ. You will receive a new glorified body at the Rapture of the Church.

Now **verse 15** sums this up—“stand firm” and “hold” these doctrines and teachings. Both verbs are present tense verbs which means God wants His people continually standing firm and taking hold of grace truth and grace eschatology. Stand firm and hold tight to these traditional teachings I have given you about the pre-Tribulation Rapture. Stand firm and hold tight to no-works grace. Continually stand for and defend Pauline instruction.

The word “tradition” (παράδοσις) does not refer to religious man-made traditions. As Dr. Walvoord said, this “does not refer to human or church traditions devised by people” (*I & II Thessalonians*, p. 144). This is a reference to handing over or handing down specific Pauline doctrine (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 339). There were two ways Paul passed on his doctrinal instruction and that is by word of mouth and by letter.

Don’t allow some quirky doctrinal teaching to pull you away from Pauline grace and all the blessings that come with the doctrines he has taught. H. A. Ironside used to say, “what is new is not true and what is true is not new.” In other words, defend Pauline grace truth and grace eschatology. Don’t be pulled away by a Marv Rosenthal and his faulty pre-wrath view or by a Gleason Archer and his faulty mid-trib view or by a Witness Lee and his faulty partial-Rapture view or an Alexander Reese and his faulty post-trib view.

Stick to your guns and stick to Pauline eschatology. Don't let anyone try to bring in Matthew into Paul because Matthew is aimed at Israel and Paul is aimed at the church. Take a strong stand against John MacArthur's Lordship salvation and defend Pauline grace. Stand for it and hold on to it. Defend the great grace teachings of C. I. Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer.

Now in between this great doctrinal section of II Thessalonians 2 and the final exhortations of II Thessalonians 3, Paul prays a special prayer for the Thessalonian church and for the believers in **II Thessalonians 2:16-17**. The prayer is apostolic and powerful and it is specifically designed to give comfort and hope to the Church.

Paul specifically addresses his prayer to the first two members of the Trinity, which clearly shows the co-equality in Deity, between God the Son and God the Father.

Addressee #1 - Paul requests that our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, Personally answer this prayer.

Addressee #2 - Paul requests that God our Father Personally answer this prayer.

So Paul asks two members of the Trinity to specifically consider this prayer request.

He qualifies our status with God in a threefold way:

- 1) God the Father and God the Son loved us.
- 2) God the Father and God the Son give us eternal comfort.
- 3) God the Father and God the Son give us good hope by grace.

So if you are a believer you may know that you are living in the age of grace and hope, not the age of Tribulation threat. You have eternal comfort for you are forever right with God.

Now the specific request is that we be comforted and strengthened in grace.

It is very clear that when we have a grasp of grace, we have: 1) Good hope; 2) Good works; 3) Good words.

Our good hope that we have from understanding God's grace is what leads to good works and good words.

In this unstable world in which we live, God wants us stable, not fickle. He wants us secure, not insecure. Precise knowledge of Pauline grace makes that clear.