

## Standing Firm in Difficult Times 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

**“<sup>13</sup> But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: <sup>14</sup> Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”**

### Welcomes and Warnings

Do you find the Scriptures to be welcoming? Or do you find them to be a continual warning? Is God’s Word a delight to you? Or does it frighten you with thoughts of coming destruction?

Those who really know the Lord welcome His Word and find welcome in His Word. Yes, it is true that God chastises [corrects] His children (Hebrews 12:6-11). But afterward, this correction yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in His sons. By contrast, those who not know the Lord find no welcome in His Word. For them, the Scriptures are full of strong warnings.

2 Thessalonians chapter 2, presents a study in contrasts. It begins with a welcoming appeal to believers: the coming of our Lord and our gathering unto Him (vs. 1-2). So, we should not let current events or false prophecies frighten us. Many commentators take the expression, “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” as an umbrella expression<sup>i</sup> that includes the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ. This would mean that “our gathering unto Him” refers to the Rapture. This is a welcome thought to God’s children. Paul still wanted the Thessalonian believers to know about prophecies and the coming Antichrist. But this was not to make them fearful.

However, verses 3 through 12 present a strong warning to those who do not know the Lord. They pronounce doom upon the Antichrist and those who will be deceived by him.

Today’s message can be summed up in one sentence: Thank the Lord and stand on His Word.

### Giving Thanks

The word, “but” in verse 13 highlights this contrast but also continues a previous thought. It is a prayer of thanksgiving – in contrast to the warning about the doom of the Antichrist and his followers. But verse 13 also presents a continuation of the giving of thanks that began in 2 Thessalonians 1:3: **“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren . . .”**

#### ■ Giving Thanks to God

**“<sup>13</sup> But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord . . .”**

Paul wrote to those who loved the truth. They were not deceived and perishing (vs. 11-12); they had believed the truth and did not take pleasure in unrighteousness. As a result, Paul gave thanks to God for these believers. Verse 13 begins with the words, “we are bound” or “we ought” to give thanks. In these verses, Paul explained why it was right and good that he should give thanks to God. He gave thanks for the Thessalonian believers, because they were **“brethren beloved of the Lord . . .”** The Lord loved them, and they loved the Lord. So, thank the Lord and stand on His Word.

Just this week, the Washington Post reported, *“The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists advanced the symbolic Doomsday Clock a notch closer to the end of humanity Thursday, moving it ahead by 30 seconds after what the organization called a “grim assessment” of the state of geopolitical affairs. ‘As of today,’ Bulletin president Rachel Bronson told reporters, ‘it is two minutes to midnight’ — as close as the world has ever been to the hour of apocalypse. In moving the clock forward, the group cited ‘the failure of President Trump and other world leaders to deal with looming threats of nuclear war and climate change.’”*<sup>ii</sup>

When reports like this one use the word “apocalypse,” they refer to the end of the world. But the word originally meant “revelation” or “unveiling.” (The Greek word [*apokalypsis*] is the first word in the opening phrase of the Book of Revelation: “the Revelation of Jesus Christ.”) The world fears “the apocalypse,” but the Revelation of Jesus Christ is a source of comfort to God’s people. How should we respond to frightening news such as this Washington Post article? How can we stand firm in difficult times? We should give thanks for our brethren who are beloved of the Lord. Thank the Lord and stand on His Word.

**“ . . . because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:”**

#### ■ **Giving Thanks Because God Has Chosen You**

Paul gave thanks to God because the Lord had chosen these believers. Though the mystery of iniquity was at work, God had chosen them, just as surely as He had chosen Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6-7; 26:18).

##### ▪ **From the beginning**

The phrase, “from the beginning” refers to the fact that this choice was made before time began.

##### ▪ **To salvation**

For what, or to what had the Lord chosen them? He had chosen them to be saved.

##### ▪ **Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth**

How had the Lord demonstrated His choice? He had done so through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and their faith in the Gospel. In verse 13, “sanctification [or “setting apart”] of the Spirit,” does not refer to the believer’s progressive growth in holiness. In this case, it refers to the believer’s salvation. The word is used this way in Hebrews 10:10, **“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”** The word is used the same way in 1 Peter 1:2, **“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:”** In both 2 Thessalonians and 1 Peter, we can see all three members of the Trinity at work in our salvation. The Father chose us, the Spirit set us apart by His work of conviction, and Jesus finished the work of redemption by His death on the cross. So, thank the Lord and stand on His Word.

Much of this work is going on “behind the scenes” out of our sight. But what evidence can we see? We see it in **“belief of the truth.”** When you placed your faith in the truth of the Gospel, God saved you. Now some may ask, “Well which one was it? Was it God’s saving work or our believing in the truth? According to this passage, it was God’s sovereign work, setting us apart, that led to us placing our faith in the truth of the Gospel. We can see this in other passages of Scripture as well. Consider John 1:12-13:

**“<sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: <sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”** When someone receives Christ and becomes a son of God by believing on His name, what do you know? According to verse 13, you know that they were not born anew by human means or human will – but of God! This eliminates any human boasting about salvation:

**“<sup>8</sup> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

And according to 2 Thessalonians 2:14, every believer was called by the preaching of the Gospel:

**“<sup>14</sup> Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

■ **Because God called you**

▪ **By our Gospel**

How can you see this great saving work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? You can see it in the preaching of the Gospel – and the sinner’s receiving that Gospel. An illustration variously attributed to C.H. Spurgeon and Donald Grey Barnhouse helps us understand. Picture a very large cross – so large that it has a door at the bottom. Above the door are written the words of Revelation 22:17, **“Whosoever will may come.”** This is the free offer from God to every man, woman and child. And when that person enters in through the door – becoming a child of God – he or she finds a wonderful welcome surprise on the other side of the door. Above the inside of the door are written the words of Ephesians 1:4, **“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . .”** Can we explain all of God’s sovereign work? No! But we know that it is clearly proclaimed in the Bible.

▪ **To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**

The work of the Satan and the Antichrist will lead men to doom. The work of our Lord Jesus Christ will lead men to glory! At the end of all things, God will bring about the believers’ glorification. This is why Paul would write in Romans 8:18, **“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”**

We ought to give thanks to God who chose us and called us to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank the Lord and stand on His Word.

### **Standing Firm**

**<sup>15</sup> Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”**

**Hold the Scriptural traditions which you have been taught**

Paul stressed the importance of Scriptural traditions (in contrast to worldly traditions, Colossians 2:8). In 1 Corinthians 11 (with reference to the Lord’s Table) and in 1 Corinthians 15 (with reference to the Gospel), Paul “delivered” that which he had “received.” So in those difficult times (see 2 Thessalonians 1:4), Paul appealed to them to stand firm. Whether by word (apostolic teaching) or letters from the apostles, Paul appealed to them to keep their feet firmly grounded on the Word.

**Applications:** How would we apply this today? Should you believe that all of nature came about through an accidental “big bang” or is it creation by the direct act of God? Stand firm. When the world

tells you that you were born with the wrong gender, how should you respond? Stand firm on Scriptural teaching. When it seems that national and international leaders have gone berserk, keep standing firm on Biblical doctrine. When doomsday scientists tell you that we are close to everything going up in smoke, stand fast in the Gospel and God's promises. When you are persecuted for the name of Christ, keep standing.

- ✓ Give thanks to God for your brothers and sisters in Christ. They are beloved of the Lord!
- ✓ Give thanks for the work of the Father, the Spirit and the Son in your salvation. If you are a believer, give God the glory!
- ✓ Give thanks for the Gospel – the good news of God's saving work
- ✓ Stand firm in the Scriptural traditions that you have been taught
- ✓ Turn your heart back to God and find that the Scriptures welcome you home
- ✓ Thank the Lord and stand on His Word.

### ***A Brief Analysis of the Passage***

#### **Give Thanks**

- To God
  - For you, brethren (beloved of the Lord)
- Because God
  - Has from the beginning chosen you
    - To salvation
    - Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth
- God called you
  - By our Gospel
  - To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ

#### **Therefore, Brethren**

- Stand firm
- Hold the traditions
  - which you have been taught
    - By word
    - By letter

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<sup>i</sup> Bruce Compton, unpublished notes on 2 Thessalonians. He writes, "In that the two phrases [coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering unto him] form a Granville Sharp impersonal construction, the pretribulation rapture interpretation appears correct. Wallace argues for the second phrase as a subset of the first and notes that there are no examples of the impersonal Granville Sharp construction where the two phrases are synonymous, as with the posttribulation rapture interpretation" (citing Exegetical Syntax, pp. 286-90).

<sup>ii</sup> Lindsey Bever, et.al. The Washington Post, January 25, 2018 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2018/01/25/after-a-missile-scare-and-insult-war-with-north-korea-its-time-to-check-the-doomsday-clock/?hpid=hp\\_no-name\\_hp-in-the-news%3Apage%2Fin-the-news&utm\\_term=.fee5eb4d7744](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2018/01/25/after-a-missile-scare-and-insult-war-with-north-korea-its-time-to-check-the-doomsday-clock/?hpid=hp_no-name_hp-in-the-news%3Apage%2Fin-the-news&utm_term=.fee5eb4d7744)