

Nothing But The Truth
2 Thessalonians 2:13-17
Part One

Paul was a balanced Christian who had a balanced ministry, and we see evidence of this as he brings this letter to a close. What we will see is a transition from a discussion concerning the coming antichrist and the day of the Lord to matters of practical Christian living.

Certainly, the study of prophecy is important, but if the study of prophecy does not have a practical impact on the way we live, then we have failed to understand the significance of the prophetic message. Certainly, we see this clearly stated for us in **2 Peter 3:9-11**. In this passage Peter is talking about God’s faithfulness in bringing about all those events that he has promised, including that day of final judgment, upon the earth called the “day of the Lord.” Hopefully, you will remember before I read this passage that I shared with you that the “day of the Lord” in the Scriptures is not referring to a 24 hr. period of time but rather an extended period of time beginning as we saw in **2 Thess. 2** shortly after the “revealing” of the man of lawlessness, or the antichrist. This will take place during the period of time known as the tribulation and will continue through the tribulation culminating in two major outpourings of judgment. The first cataclysmic outpouring of judgment will take place at the end of the tribulation when Christ returns to set up his kingdom. The second cataclysmic outpouring of judgment, or the second wave of judgment, is recorded for us here in **2 Pet. 3:9-11**, and this event takes place at the end of the millennium just prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth. Let us read, **“But the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (11) Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.”** We must never let the study of prophecy be an escape from our responsibility today.

Certainly, Paul understood this and we see him making use of his discussion concerning future things to impact the day to day experience of the Thessalonians here at the end of this chapter. The transition in thought is clearly indicated by the word “but” in **V. 13**. Paul had just, prior to this verse, been speaking to the Thessalonians about the great deception that was going to take place in the future through the so-called man of lawlessness when he is revealed. He had spoken to them about the deluding influence that the Lord would send on those “who perish” or, in other words, on those who were on the path to ruin. None of those things will happen in respect to the righteous. In reassuring them of these very things, he reminds them of specific responsibilities that they and all believers have presently in respect to truth.

Paul, in these concluding verses of **2 Thess. 2:11-17**, will share with us four different responsibilities that we need to pay attention to in respect to God’s truth.

Let us read this section of Scripture. **“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) And 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.” What is the first responsibility in light of those things that are coming?

Our first responsibility is to make sure we believe the truth (vv. 13-14)

Days of judgment are coming. Days of wrath are coming. In light of this we need to make sure that we are prepared, that we have responded properly to truth. Certainly, the Thessalonian believers had in fact done this.

We have noted Paul’s repeated thanksgiving for the Thessalonian church in his letters (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3, 2:13) and again we see this spirit of thanksgiving. Let us read **VV. 13-14, “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) And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul, in essence, in these verses is giving thanks for the way they responded to God’s word in their lives. These Thessalonians left no room to doubt that their faith in the gospel of Christ was genuine, and that they were in fact saved. In these two verses Paul reviewed the stages in their salvation experience.

The first stage of their salvation experience was God’s love for them. Look at **V. 13, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord.”** Their salvation experience, as well as ours, began when God in eternity past decided to put his love on them as well as us. This is where salvation begins. Without any influence outside of Himself, God predetermined to set his love on those that **Rom. 9:23** calls “**vessels of mercy.**” This is reinforced in **Ephesians 1:3-5** when it says that “**In love he predestined us.**” We must never conceive of His great plan of salvation as impersonal. It is clearly rooted in his eternal love.

The second stage of their salvation was that God chose them “**because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.**” Flowing out of the predetermined love of God was a choice. This choice was made when? It says, “**from the beginning.**” This means in eternity past. Before there was time, God chose the Thessalonians and all Christians for salvation. God’s choice was not an after thought. It was not as if he waited to see if we might, in some sort of way, demonstrate something good or wonderful so that we might merit his choice. No. He chose us for salvation even before we were conceived.

This thought is all through the Scripture. That is why the New Testament calls the church “the elect.” In **John 15:16** makes this very clear. The verse says, “**You did not choose me but I chose you.**”

The doctrine of God’s sovereign elective love crushes human pride. It is a very humbling thing

to know that our salvation has nothing to do with any personal merit that we think might exist in our lives. Rather, it has everything to do with his eternal love which led him to make a choice of us from the beginning, or in other words before time for salvation.

This leads us to a third stage in the salvation experience - Not only did He love us, not only did He choose us, but He also transforms us.

The third stage of their salvation is that God transforms us. Look again at the passage. What does it say? **“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.”** How is the transformation of salvation accomplished? **“Through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”** Two elements are involved in the transformation of salvation.

The first element is called “Sanctification by the Spirit.” “Sanctified means “set apart.” This simply means that the Holy Spirit sovereignly, miraculously, and divinely detaches us from sin. The transformation of salvation is totally dependent on this taking place.

But in what sense does the Spirit do this? First of all, He does this by making us a new creature. **2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”** At the point of our salvation we are transformed into a new person. We are no longer the same. In what ways are we changed by the Spirit? First of all, he unites us with Christ. He places us in Christ This is positional sanctification. Because we can be viewed in Christ and be seen as righteous in Him, we can be called “saints.” What does **1 Cor. 1:2** say? **“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”**

If you are here this morning and are saved, then you are positionally a saint. I am sure you are all aware that Mother Teresa died recently. The Pope had to make a decision whether or not he would put her on the fast track to sainthood from the Roman Catholic position. Let me share with you the Scriptural version of the fast track. In fact, let me share with you from the Scriptures the only track to sainthood. The fast track, the only track to sainthood, is achieved when we call on the Lord Jesus to save us.

But even though this is true of us positionally, practically speaking, I know that we all feel very far from being saints. In Christ I know that God sees me as righteous but I know that I am very far from it in a practical sense. Is there any hope for us in terms of the daily grind of living? Of course there is. The sanctifying work of the Spirit does not only impact me positionally but practically.

Our inner man has come alive to God and it wants to be pleasing to God. We are given a hunger for righteousness. We are no longer content with our lives as they are. Our sinful desires and impulses may very well continue to rise up to tempt us to evil originating from the flesh that we have inherited from Adam, but the real me, the new me will desire to walk in righteousness. Paul

stated it this way in **Rom. 7:22**, “**For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man.**” This work is the work of the Lord. We cannot set ourselves apart. It is God who does this through His Spirit. He sets us apart both positionally and practically. Positional sanctification is how God sees us in Christ. Practical sanctification is the change that the Spirit is producing in us that we and others can see.

The transformation of salvation requires two elements. First of all it requires the sanctifying work of the Spirit. This is the divine side. But it also requires “**faith in the truth.**” This is the human side. Let us continue to read, “**God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.**” Notice that last phrase, “**faith in the truth.**” God has not only chosen us for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, but he has chosen us for salvation through “faith in the truth.” This is the human side of the equation. For the Spirit to sanctify and make us a new creature, we must exercise faith.

Let us not become confused on this point. Though we are to exercise faith, it is God Himself who has to produce the faith in us that will cause us to believe. Certainly, it is implied in this passage. Implied in the sense that if He in fact chose us from the beginning for salvation and if faith is necessary for this to take place, then it only seems reasonable that He would produce it lest there might be the possibility that someone He chose would not exercise faith and therefore not be saved. Believing is not the result of our goodness or our brilliance, but rather because of His choice of us in love. The expression of our faith is the result of God’s work. **John 6:27-29** says, “**Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal. (28) They said therefore to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”** Whose work? God’s work.

God has eternally chosen us on the basis of his love alone. Transforming us in salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. Paul now addresses a fourth stage in the Thessalonians unfolding salvation experience.

The fourth stage of the salvation process that is mentioned is that God called them. Look at **V. 14**, “**And it was for this He called you through our gospel.**” This call is what we call an effective call. We call it effective call because it worked. It is what theologians call “irresistible grace.” That is, God called and you could not resist. When does this call take place? It takes place when, in God’s time, you hear the gospel and respond.

We all have our stories. I was not raised going to church. I was unfamiliar with the Scriptures and yet 35 years ago, God in eternity past loved me. Out of that love flowed his choice of me. And in God’s time he brought me face to face with the gospel of Jesus. He produced in me the faith to believe. When I believed, I experienced the transformation of salvation, became a saint and was given a heart that wants to live a life pleasing to Him.

What about you? In light of the future judgments that the Scriptures speak of are you ready? Are you sure that you in fact saved?