

2 Thessalonians (3)- Stand Firm

(2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

I. Introduction

- A. Man calls son in Chicago, “*Hate to ruin holiday, but Mom and I are divorcing*”
 - 1. Son is shocked, but his father says, “*Call your sister in New York; it’s over*”
 - a. Daughter calls, “You are not divorcing; we will be there tomorrow”
 - b. Man hangs up and, “*Honey, kids are coming home for Thanksgiving!*”
 - 2. The lady looking through the Butterballs and not finding one big enough
 - a. She asked the guy behind the counter, “*Do these turkeys get any bigger*”
 - b. He looked and said with straight face, “*No ma’am, they’re all dead*”
 - 3. Enough with the Thanksgiving humor; from now on I’m dead serious
- B. **Public Service Announcement:** First Thanksgiving wasn’t by the Pilgrims!
 - 1. The first Thanksgiving was in Virginia **two years** before Plymouth Rock
 - a. First Thanksgiving in colonies was Berkeley Hundred (*Berkeley Plantation*)
 - b. Thirty-eight colonists from Berkeley, England had service (Dec 4, 1619)
 - c. Cpt. John Woodlief knelt beside the James River and proclaimed—
Wee ordaine that the day of our ships arrivall at the place assigned for plantacon in the land of Virginia shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God
 - 2. Pilgrims had a great PR guy, but the first Thanksgiving was by Virginians
 - a. OK, Spanish explorer Juan de Onate held a service bear El Paso in 1598
 - b. But Texas doesn’t count! The first Thanksgiving was in Virginia.
- C. Last week, we began a series of studies from the book of **2 Thessalonians**
 - 1. Here’s where you can marvel at my planning and organizational skills
 - a. On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, Paul begins our text (**2 Th 2:13**)
But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord...
 - b. This actually reflects the words Paul uses to begin the letter (**2 Th 1:3**)
We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so...
 - 2. Paul had been forced to leave Thessalonica 3 wks after planting the church
 - a. And he is forced to nurture this church long distance—letters and trips
 - b. He gives thanksgiving to God that they are remaining in the faith
 - 3. Let’s look and see what it was for which Paul was so thankful

II. Thankful for What God Has Done (2 Thess 2:13-14)

¹³ *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*

A. Paul starts with this reminder that they are “*beloved by the Lord*” (ESV)

1. They needed this reminder because of “*persecutions and trials*” (2 Th 1:4)
 - a. When in the middle of trials/struggles, it’s easy to think God has forgotten
 - 1) Remember how Job viewed his struggles and difficulties? (Job 6:4)
*The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison;
God’s terrors are marshaled against me.*
 - 2) Can you understand why Job felt that? Some understand all too well!
 - b. Paul wants these Christians to know that they were God beloved children
 - c. He would be there with them to give them strength to endure their trial
2. Not only were they God’s beloved, they were God’s chosen people
 - a. It is humbling to know that God has chosen, selected and elected YOU
 - b. God knows you, He loves you, wants relationship with you—chose you
 - 1) Question: How are we going to respond to Him? Will we choose Him?
 - 2) Remember Mary’s response when she realized a choosing (Lk 1:38)
“I am the Lord’s servant...May it be to me as you have said.”

B. There is a bit of textual problem; our English translation reflect the difference

1. **Option #1:** Some translations have them chosen as God’ firstfruits
Because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved... (ESV, see also NRSV, NLT, TEV)
 - a. The firstfruits offering was the giving of the first of the harvest to God
 - b. Paul sometimes uses this to refer to his early converts (1 Cor 16:15)
¹⁵ *You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia,*
 - 1) The word “first” here is actually the Greek word for “*firstfruits*”
 - 2) Paul is saying the Thessalonians were his first converts in the area
 - 3) But their faithfulness and service would lead to many more
2. **Option #2:** Some versions have Paul saying they’re chosen from beginning
Because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation (NASB, also NIV, NET, KJV)
 - a. This would have Paul saying they were chosen from beginning of time
 - b. Their salvation was due to original purpose and plan of God (Eph1:4)
For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.
 - c. God chose them; like Mary, they needed to be faithful to their choosing

3. Doesn't mean God arbitrarily chose which individuals to save or condemn
 - a. In the Old Testament, God chose Israel as His special people (**Deut 7:6**)
⁶For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.
 - 1) How did individual Jews become chosen? Born into the chosen
 - 2) In same way, we're chosen when we're born again into chosen nation
 - b. What is chosen or predestined was God's new special people— church
 - c. We are called into that chosen people by the gospel of God's grace
 - 1) Moses stresses that Israel did nothing to deserve choosing (**Dt 7:7**)
The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.
 - 2) We do nothing to serve or earn our status as the chosen—it is all God
 - d. But like Israel, we are called to be faithful to our election, our choosing
- C. That's what Paul says when he mentions the sanctifying work of Spirit (**v. 14**)
 1. The word "holy" means to be set apart for God's special purpose
 - a. To make someone or something holy, set apart for God, is "to sanctify"
 - b. A "saint" is someone who has "been sanctified," set apart for God
 2. This act of sanctification is spoken of in two different ways in the NT—
 - a. **Completed Act:** We are sanctified, made holy when saved by God
*"You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (**1 Cor 6:11**)*
 - b. **Ongoing Process:** We were also called to be holy—to live sanctified
*"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you thru and thru" (**1 Thess 5:23**)*
 - c. **Connection:** We have been sanctified, so we need to live sanctified
 3. Paul reminds them they that were sanctified so they will live that way
 - a. We all have a basic desire to fit in, be like everyone else, be accepted
 - 1) It isn't particularly spiritual to be strange for the sake of strange
 - 2) In fact, we need to fit into the world enough to impact it for Christ
 - b. **Problem:** We fit in so well that we stop being holy—forget who we are
 - 1) We've been chosen by God and sanctified by Spirit—*live that way!*
 - 2) Its the difference in us that makes a difference (*What This Word Needs*)
What this world needs is for us to stop hiding behind our relevance
Blending in so well that people can't see the difference
And it's the difference that sets the world free
 4. Paul is thankful for what God has done—he points to what we must do

III. What We Must Do—Stand Firm (2 Thess 2:15)

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

A. The “so then” (“*With all these things in mind,*” NLT) shows a transition

1. Previous verses says that God loves is, chose is, saves us and sanctified us
 - a. So what is it that we are going to do? What will be our response?
 - b. We can give into the difficulties and struggles or we can “*stand firm*”
 - 1) Paul writes so this church won’t “*become easily unsettled*” (2 Th 2:2)
 - 2) He said in 1 Thess he was confident they would stand firm (1 Th 3:8)
2. God has done all the heavy lifting; He accomplished the work of salvation
 - a. We often speak of “*five steps of salvation.*” Or is it 10, 12, 40, 144,000
 - 1) There is really one step in salvation, and God took it—at the cross
 - 2) Yes, we respond to grace and accept grace, but we can’t add to grace
 - b. What we do is not so much to take steps, but to STAND (Eph 6:13-14)
¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then...
3. God has given us everything we need, we just need to stand firm in Him
 - a. Satan is going to do everything in his power to shake our faith in God
 - b. The world we live in is never going to make it easy for us to believe
 - c. So “*we must take a firm stand, feet on the ground and head high*” (MES)

B. How? Paul says that we must “*hold to the teachings we passed on to you*” (15)

1. The word “teaching” here is actually παράδοσις, or literally “*traditions*”
 - a. **Negative:** “*nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition*” (Matt 15:6)
 - b. The word literally is “*that which is handed over*” (from verb “*to deliver*”
 - 1) In secular Greek, used of inventory, “*so much of this handed over...*”
 - 2) Whether a tradition is good-bad-indifferent depends on what’s
2. What would let them stand firm? Being faithful to what was handed over
 - a. They could stand firm if they stood on the word Paul taught or wrote
 - b. Old children’s song, “*I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E*”
 - 1) In reality, we stand under the word, to be molded and shaped by it
 - 2) God’s word—what we read, we are taught—let’s us stand firm
 - c. Are you standing firm under the word? Reading? Bible class?

C. One thing is clear, if we stand firm with God, we don’t have to stand alone!