

STANDING FIRM / Sunday School- July 18, 2010

Unifying Topic: CHOSEN AND CALLED

Lesson Text

I. Called To Salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

II. Called To Stand Firm (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17)

The Main Thought: Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. (2 Thessalonians 2:15, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Commitments grow from a number of factors. What is at the heart of a commitment that makes a needed and lasting difference? The passage affirms that our Christian commitment grows from a response to being chosen by god and empowered by the Spirit.

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to hold to the teachings of Christ in spite of rival philosophies or teachings.

Life aim: To help believers follow the teachings of Christ in the midst of a pluralistic society.

2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway 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:

2:14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ

2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle

2:16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

2:17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

HISTORY:

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12:

In 1 Thessalonians Chapter one, Paul and his companions were faithful to bring encouragement to the Thessalonians in the midst of persecution. In 2nd Thessalonians, Paul explains the end times and the antichrist.

2:1-2 The Plea For Stability

Mistaken ideas about Christ's coming were confusing the Thessalonians Christians and disrupting their lives. He's saying let nothing shake or trouble you about that day. Some person was claiming these things...

1. that a spirit (some angel or some vision) had revealed to him that the day of the Lord had begun;
2. that he had a special word, a special revelation from God that the day of the Lord had begun;
3. that he had either received or heard about a letter from Paul that said the day of the Lord was at hand;

...with the suffering of savage persecution and it is easily understood why some of the believers would be shaken and troubled. "*Shaken*" means to be tossed about, agitated, shocked; and the word "*troubled*" means a continued state of tension and nervousness.

The Day Of The Lord

Paul says two quick things that we must keep in mind as we look toward the Day of the Lord.

1. The point is striking: the believer is to focus upon the Lord's return and not upon the judgment of the Lord's Day. The Day of the Lord is to be on the unbelievers, not of believers. The believer is not appointed to receive the wrath of God; he is appointed to salvation. Therefore, he is not to fear the day of the Lord, he is to be looking to the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
2. Let nothing shake or trouble you about the Day of the Lord: not a spirit, nor some so-called spiritual message, nor a writing from some so-called spiritual man.

2:3 The Apostasy / Antichrist

Let no man deceive you—watch for two significant events:

1. The first event that will launch the day of the Lord will be a great falling away of believers from God. The phrase "*falling away*" means apostasy, revolt, rebellion (against God). The point is this: before the "*Day of the Lord*"—before the terrible judgment of God can come upon the earth, there will be a great apostasy, a tragic turning away from God by millions. Man and his world will be so evil and sinful and so immoral and unjust—so much in rebellion against God—that Christ has to return and judge the world. Most of the people in the world will have gone so far that they will be beyond ever repenting.
2. The second event that will launch the "*Day of the Lord*" will be the revelation of that man of sin—the son of perdition, that is, the antichrist himself. Note the following facts:

- a. The antichrist will be revealed. He existed before his appearance.
- b. The antichrist is the man of sin which means he is the embodiment of lawlessness or total rebellion against God; doing all he can to lead a total revolt against God; man, woman, and child.
- c. The antichrist is the son of perdition which means that he will be so evil that he will be just like the son of doom and destruction, of the devil himself. He is doomed to destruction.
- d. The antichrist is so evil a world leader; a mass deceiver and murderer of millions.

The antichrist is not Satan, but he is said to be a man who will be sent by the very working of Satan. There are many antichrists who have risen throughout history to carry on Satan's work with great severity. However, Paul is not speaking of these men who stand against Christ and His followers. Paul is speaking of the one who is to appear in the end time. He is to be Satan's instrument in the most severe way. How? - By being filled with Satan's spirit.

2:4 His Character

There are five traits of the antichrist revealed in verses 3-4.

1. Man of sin
2. Son of perdition
3. Adversary, opposer of God
4. Exalter of himself
5. Claims to be God

The great system which God has revealed for human salvation and of those who would serve God in purity in the gospel of His Son, this man opposes and exalts himself above God. He wants to become the object of worship claiming such honors and such reverence even sitting in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. This can happen because the word of God says it will happen.

2:5 His Danger

This must be taught to the church. Paul had taught the Thessalonian believers all about the end time, the antichrist, the importance of the Lord's return, the day of the Lord, the great apostasy, and the rise of the antichrist. People must be taught so that some can be saved and escape the things coming upon the earth.

2:6-8 His Revelation

There is to be an historical appearance of the antichrist in the world. Note the words "*revealed in his time.*" The time is set: he is going to actually appear upon the world scene.

1. **2:6** Right now, there is some "*power of restraint*" that holds back the antichrist and keeps him from appearing. However, the day is coming when "*the restraining power*" is to be taken out of the way; then the antichrist will be revealed to the world.
2. **2:7** The *mystery of iniquity* (that is, lawlessness) is now at work in the world. The spirit of such a man is already in operation; evil is going on, but the man, not yet come who fully embodies that spirit has been hidden and restrained until the power that restrains evil is removed, *taken out of the way*.

2:8 His End

3. Men will be allowed to do their own thing and live as they desire to live. The day is coming when men will get their wish and be left to themselves without God interfering. The Lord will make quick work of the antichrist. This is the point of this verse. The antichrist poses no threat to the Lord Himself. Note, the antichrist will be destroyed when Christ returns to earth.
 - a. The Lord Jesus will slay the antichrist with the spirit of His mouth (Greek breath). What is "*the spirit of Jesus*"' "mouth"? It is the spirit of truth, holiness, and unlimited power. When Jesus speaks... When He rents the sky... Christ will speak the Word and the antichrist will be slain.
 - b. The Lord of glory will destroy the antichrist with the brightness of His coming. The whole idea of brightness is splendor, radiance, glory, and light. When Christ first appears, there will apparently be the energizing of a laser beam of glory zeroed in on the antichrist, and he shall be immediately destroyed by the radiance of the Lord's glory and light—quicker than we could blink an eye. Simply by showing Himself, the Lord will destroy the antichrist. Note; the word destroy does not mean annihilate, but to make inoperative; to make powerless; to end; to put a stop to his evil work.

2:9 His Work

The work of the antichrist, to carry on the activity of Satan upon the earth means...

- that he will be the very embodiment of Satan himself.
- that he will carry on all the lying power and signs and wonders of Satan.
- that he will carry out the very activity and work of Satan on earth.

The point to see is that Satan will have complete control over the life of the antichrist. He will be turning as many as he possibly can away from God. He will demonstrate the power and signs and wonders...

- to bring peace to earth.
- to adequately grow and distribute the food so that all may have adequate provision.
- to solve the problems of adequate health coverage, full employment, homelessness, energy crunches, and the other problems of this world.

He will claim supernatural power; he will insist that religions and gods take a back seat to him and his government. He will institute the seat of imperial worship.

2:10 Perishing

The followers of the antichrist are those who are "*perishing*" (*apollumenois*); those who are in the process of perishing. Even while a follower of the antichrist lives on the earth, he is perishing. He is on the road to being lost. Therefore, he cannot see God nor the things of God. His face and eyes are not turned toward the gospel, but toward the world that perishes. The gospel is hid to him because he is perishing, because he is traveling the road of the lost. He is simply facing the wrong direction, looking away from the gospel.

- He will lead people away from the truth.
- He will mistreat people by lying to them.
- He will lead people to believe false ideas and untruths.
- He will exalt man, government, and science.
- He will cheat people out of the inheritance they could receive.
- He will misguide people and keep them from knowing peace, true inner peace, true assurance, security, love, joy, and confidence—all qualities that build the very best of lives.

"...because they received not the love of the truth..." The word "*received*" (*edechanto*) means to welcome. They rejected the love of God and the result is they are not saved. They are not lost because God want them to be, but because they chose to be. God offered them saving truth in the gospel of Christ and they refused it.

The followers of the antichrist are deceived. There are always two factors involved in deception.

1. The deceit of the deceiver.
2. The willingness of the person to reject the truth and to believe a lie.

2:11 Deceived

"For this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie" God does not mislead people. A person is not deceived apart from his own will or against his will. A person is deceived only because he chooses to disbelieve God and His Word. The point is this: it is because people reject the truth of the gospel that they shall suffer strong delusion and believe the lie of the antichrist. "*Strong delusion*" (*energeian planes*) mean a working of error. In the end time, people will work error after error, sin after sin, evil after evil. They will become stronger and stronger in their sin, harder and harder. The great tragedy is that a person cannot reject Jesus Christ and expect things to stay as they are. What a warning to men!

2:12 Damned

The followers of the antichrist are damned—those who take pleasure in unrighteousness. The word "*damned*" (*kriithosin*) means judged, condemned, punished. There are two reasons why the followers of the antichrist will be judged.

1. They will not believe the truth of the gospel. Therefore, if a person rejects the sacrificial death of Christ, he cannot expect God to overlook the dishonor done to His Son.
2. They will have pleasure in unrighteousness. They will be people who love their sins.
 - a. They will lust with their eyes.
 - b. They will lust with their flesh.
 - c. They will seek the pride of life.

Note the awful tragedy of all this: man is the total focus; God is forgotten altogether. Man loves himself and himself alone. Therefore the judgment, condemnation, and punishment of God shall fall upon those who love their unrighteousness (sin).

LESSON:

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 Called To Salvation

Now that we know that the end will come and the antichrist will be revealed, God's judgment will be on those who have rejected His truth. God's plan is not for man to perish, however, He gives people freedom to turn to him and choose salvation.

2:13a Paul continues to *give thanks to God*. He lets the Thessalonians know that his prayer and greeting to the brethren who are loved by the Lord, is thanksgiving. "*But we are bound to give thanks...*" Note the word "*but*." This passage is a sharp contrast between the followers of the antichrist and the followers of Christ. The followers of the antichrist are to be damned, that is judged, condemned, and punished. **But** the followers of the Lord are the beloved of the Lord.

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Why? - Because they follow Him. They believe Him, all that claim that He is truly the Son of God who has come to earth...

- To die for men
- to save men from death and judgment
- to give men eternal life
- To bring assurance, love, joy, and peace to men as they walk throughout life.

The followers of the Lord are the beloved of the Lord. Paul consistently taught that salvation begins and ends with God. God hath from the beginning chosen them to salvation. The Greek word for "*chosen*" (*heilato*) is strong. The word's uniqueness is this: it is one of the words that is used when God chose Israel (Deut.26:18; 7:6-7).

2:13b "*Because God hath chosen you to salvation...*" We can do nothing to be saved on our own merit—we must accept God's gift of salvation; no other way.

1. God has chosen believers to be saved from the beginning, that is, before the foundation of the world. Just think of the security in this. If God saw us as saved before the earth was made; if God saw us saved before we were ever born, then there is no way we can be lost and removed from His love and care. This is what Jesus meant when He said: "*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*" Jh.10:28-29.

What security! Having been chosen by God to salvation—chosen from the beginning, from eternity past—before the earth was ever established. There is no judgment or condemnation for the believer; the believer will not be judged and condemned with the followers of the antichrist, nor with any other unbelievers. Note a most crucial point: in the bible the truth of God's choice (election and predestination) is not so much a statement of theology or philosophy—it is more a message that speaks to the spiritual experience of the believer. If the pure logic of philosophy and theology is applied, then God's choice says that God chooses some for heaven and others for a terrible hell. But this is simply not what God means in the passages dealing with *His choice*, and this fact needs to be given close attention by all ministers. What God want believers to do is to take heart, for He has assured their salvation and given them the greatest security imaginable. This is what He means by His having chosen us to salvation. The next two points show how salvation takes place, both God's part and man's part.

2. **2:13c** God has *chosen* believers *through sanctification* of the Spirit. The word sanctification means to set apart or be separated unto God. We must always remember this fact (too many forget it and thereby become inconsistent in their theology and teaching of the Word). A man is a dead spirit; therefore, he can do nothing spiritually just as a dead body can do nothing physically. The natural man prefers self and sin; therefore, if a man with a dead spirit is to come to Christ, he has to be acted upon and drawn by God. Both God's Spirit and man have a part in salvation. The part of God's Spirit is to move upon the heart of a man and stir him to set apart his life unto God. How does the Spirit of God do this?
 - a. The Holy Spirit quickens the gospel to a man's mind so that he *sees it as never before*. He sees, understands, grasps as never before that "*the Father...hath sent*" Christ to feed and nourish man (to save and to give him life).
 - b. The Holy Spirit convicts a man, of righteousness and of judgment, that is, of his need to be fed and nourished (saved and given life).
 - c. The Holy Spirit attracts men to the cross of Christ through its glorious provisions.
 - d. The Holy Spirit stirs a man to respond by coming to Christ.
3. **2:13d** God has chosen believers through "*belief of the truth*", that is, through believing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. The Lord Jesus Christ has died for believers: taken their sins upon himself and suffered the penalty, judgment, condemnation, and punishment of their sins. He has sacrificed and substituted His life for them.
 - b. The Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead for believers: conquered death and ascended into heaven for them.

The believers of the world believe the gospel with all their hearts: believe they will never have to die because Jesus Christ died for them—believe they shall ascend into heaven to live eternally with the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. They believe and have entrusted their lives to this glorious truth. The point is this: when a person **really believes the truth of the gospel**, God saves him. This is man's part in salvation. No person has ever been saved who did not believe the truth of the gospel. And no person who has rejected the gospel is lost because God has not chosen him. The person is lost because he rejected Christ. God will choose any person who will accept Christ. This is His Word; it is the promise of His Word. God will not force us to believe nor will He keep us from believing. The choice is every person's choice. No person is forced to receive or to reject Christ. Every person is responsible for his own decision.

2:14 "He called you by His gospel..." The gospel is the means God has chosen for calling the world to be reconciled to Him. God worked through Paul with his companions to tell the Good News. **2:14b** "...to the obtaining of the glory..." The purpose of salvation is to gain the glory of Christ. Remember: the Thessalonian believers were suffering severe persecution. They were bound for glory—to obtain and share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The word "glory" (*doxēs*) means to possess perfect light and to be full of perfect light; to dwell in the perfect light, brilliance, splendor, brightness, luster, and magnificence of God. Rather than hogging the glory as our fallen nature would, God loves to share. He calls, cleanses, and matures us so we can be with Christ in His glory (see Jh.17:5, 22-24 NIV).

2 Thessalonians 2:15-17 Called To Stand Firm

2:15 The duty of salvation is to "stand fast and hold to (cling) to the traditions." Note the word "traditions" (*paradoxeis*). It means "to hand down by tradition; passed on", all the Word of God whether it is taught or written. These traditions were the gospel itself which had been preached among the Thessalonians. Paul uses the word "taught" here for what was often called preaching. While actually teaching or preaching the Word of God we are to stand fast and cling to the Word; not buckle under to the world and its enticements; not to cave in, as the followers of the antichrist will do. But, we are to stand fast and cling to the Word of God no matter the inducement and the opposition.

2:16 As Paul continues, this is one of many benedictions Paul has given in his letters. Paul never goes for long without reminding Christians that we owe everything to the love of God and His free gift of grace through Jesus Christ, as the true source of encouragement and strength. God's promises are faithful regardless of our earthly situation. A faithful Christian always has hope. When under persecution there is always a temptation to turn away from Christ to avoid the cost of following Him. We need encouragement to be faithful. It is comforting to know that when we try to do or say anything good, God adds his power to what we are doing, so we do better than we could alone. Or Paul may be saying God and Christ strengthen us in the desire to do and say what is good. The resources of what we draw from through salvation are fivefold: The person who is saved receives...

1. God's love, Christ Himself.
2. Eternal consolation (*paraklesin aionian*) meaning eternal encouragement, comfort, and strength that cannot be shaken by anything—no matter what it is—either now or in eternity.
3. A good hope. What greater hope could the believer have than to live in glory with the Lord forever and ever. Note: our hope is given us through the grace of God and through His grace alone.
4. **2:17** Comfort (*parakalesai*). The word means exhortation, encouragement, admonition. Note that God and Christ are the Ones who can comfort, exhort, and encourage us.
5. Strength—the person who is saved is established in every good word and work. The word "stablish" (*sterixai*) means to strengthen, secure, make stable, set fast, and make firm. The one thing men long for is to be secure, strong, and firmly established in life. God is able to fulfill this longing. God is able to establish and strengthen man and to give him a strong life.

SUMMARY:

Paul assures the Thessalonians that they have been both chosen (v.13) and called (v.14) for service. How did God choose to save the Thessalonians? -Through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. Only God, through their belief in Christ, can save them. Paul's declaration that they were chosen from the beginning can be seen as referring to the beginning of his ministry to the Thessalonians or more broadly to the very beginning of time. What is clear is that salvation is the purpose of their selection. Paul is reiterating that the Thessalonians cannot accomplish their own salvation. Similarly, their Christlike growth can only be accomplished through the working of the Spirit. God called them by the gospel to the obtaining (gaining) of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Having reassured the Thessalonian saints of their sure and certain calling and selection and the ultimate glory of God, Paul offers them a final word of encouragement. Knowing that their trials and tribulations are not over, Paul urges them to "stand fast, and hold to the traditions which ye have been taught" (v.15). The "traditions" Paul mentions here should be understood as those godly teachings that have been given to the church by word and by Paul's letters. It is to these teachings that Paul is urging the Thessalonian believers to cling to what they have been taught in spite of the perils facing them. In verses 16-17, Paul gives a prayer of blessing for divine encouragement and strength for the Thessalonian believers. Paul mentions that God and Jesus will give them everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. that Jesus and God will comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work.

APPLICATION:

Just because you are chosen and called, you still have to do something. Standing firm takes a prepared heart to trust Christ all the way and that He will empower your spirit to hold on.

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