

Standing Firm in Your Faith

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

To the resilient congregation of Thessalonica, enduring persecution from Judaizers for their divergence from Mosaic Law and from Roman authorities for their refusal to worship multiple gods and the Emperor, Apostle Paul expresses profound gratitude that “God chose them for salvation,”¹ ensuring their unshakable eternal destiny. It is not our “praiseworthy yet ultimately fickle conduct”² that we can stand firm on the Day of the Lord’s return as sheep! No one can “earn God’s love or prove themselves worthy of God’s election by what they do for God,”³ for all have sinned and fallen short of His glory (Romans 3:23) and everyone’s righteousness is nothing more than mere filthy rags to Him (Isaiah 64:6)! One can only obtain salvation by God choosing them and through the “sanctifying

work of the Spirit and through faith in the truth” (2:13).⁴ “Echoing Deuteronomy 33:12 where Moses blessed the Benjaminites, calling them beloved of the Lord,” Paul rejoices that the “Gentiles are now



part of the new Israel, the church!”⁵ They were grafted into the Vine as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 11:11-24).⁶ For those who might doubt or fear losing their salvation

and eternal destiny Paul reassures them that standing on the foundation of faith in a risen Savior was wise for “it would be unthinkable for God to loose anyone whom He chooses to save,⁷ and erase what has been “etched indelibly in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 13:8)?⁸

Reflection. In life, we often encounter various fears, from public speaking to spiders, snakes, chronic illnesses, bullies, and the fear of

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 302.

² Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 549.

³ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 236.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 301.

⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *1 & 2 Thessalonians: Verse by Verse*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Danielle Thevenaz, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 188.

⁶ Daniel M. Gurtner, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 632–633.

⁷ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 237.

⁸ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 236.

poverty. Yet, amidst these apprehensions, there remains one unwavering truth: the assurance that Satan, despite his relentless prowling like a roaring lion, cannot snatch a single child of God from His protective hand. We are not mere branches to be discarded at the first sign of sin; rather, we have been firmly grafted into the Vine, chosen by God with a love that surpasses our imperfections. If sinlessness were a prerequisite for acceptance by the Lord, then alas, we would all fall short.

Beautiful are the feet of Apostle Paul who received the night vision to preach the Gospel in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10).⁹ The message Paul gave to the Thessalonians thankfully was not of human but divine origin and as such was “supernatural in scope and heavenly in essence.”¹⁰ To a church that was being persecuted by their community who heaped shame upon them for believing in but one God, they desperately needed to hear the truth that “God elected them for the purpose of their future obtaining of the glory of Christ.”¹¹ According to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, believers find assurance that they are not merely God’s creation, but His beloved children. As stated in Romans 8:16-17, believers share in the sufferings of Christ, which in turn guarantees their participation in His glory. In the

⁹ Gene L. Green, [The Letters to the Thessalonians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 327.

¹⁰ Grant R. Osborne, [1 & 2 Thessalonians: Verse by Verse](#), ed. Elliot Ritzema and Danielle Thevenaz, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 189.

epistle to the Thessalonians, it is emphasized that believers have every reason to rejoice, for the entire Trinity is in their favor. God has chosen and called them, Jesus sacrificed Himself



to redeem them, and the Holy Spirit is actively sanctifying them.¹² In a world overshadowed by sin and its repercussions, the pursuit of earthly glory holds little significance compared to the eternal glory promised to those who align themselves with the will of God.¹³ Until this world is freed from its “bondage of decay” (Romans 8:21) believers will face wars and rumors of wars, persecution for righteousness’ sake, debilitating diseases of various kinds, famines, and bodies that over time ache and break down and return to the dust in which they were formed. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the trials and tribulations encountered in life are transient, as expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:17. He emphasizes that these hardships pale in comparison to the imminent return of the Lord, as described in 1

¹¹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 555.

¹² Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 238.

¹³ Jay E. Adams, [Romans, Philippians, I Thessalonians, and II Thessalonians](#), The Christian Counselor’s Commentary (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 229.

Thessalonians 4:13-18. At that moment, with a resounding command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God, the dead will rise, and those who are alive will join the Lord in the air. Their mortal bodies will undergo a miraculous transformation, becoming glorious like Christ's, as highlighted in Philippians 3:21. This anticipation of the day of the Lord's return fills believers with eager anticipation and profound hope.

Reflection. The Day of the Lord is quickly approaching, are you ready? When He descends with a multitude of angels, will He discover us faithfully executing His will, devoted to His honor and glory? Or shall He find us blending in with the morally adrift of this world? Though the exact timing of His return eludes us, we can ready ourselves by consistently living lives that reflect the essence of the Gospel. Every passing moment offers an opportunity to align our actions, thoughts, and words with the profound truths of the Gospel, thus ensuring that we stand prepared to meet Him when He comes.

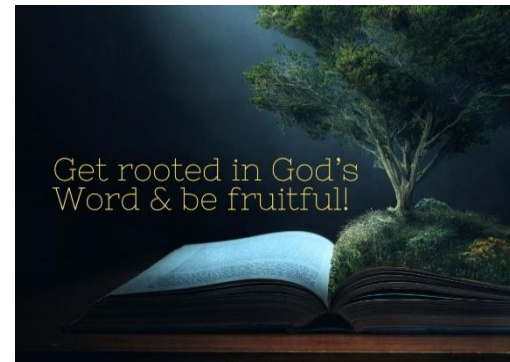
¹⁴ Mark Howell et al., [*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 238.

¹⁵ Mark Howell et al., [*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 238.

¹⁶ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 557.

Standing Firm on the Word of God

The only way to stand firm against the “strong winds of false teaching”¹⁴ is to hold on to the truth of God’s word!¹⁵ “While Paul frequently encourages believers to ‘stand firm’ in various aspects such as “in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 3:8; Philippians 4:1), “in the faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13), or “in the Spirit” (Philippians 1:27), in this instance, he accentuates the



vital significance of both comprehending and embodying the teachings of God's word."¹⁶ Numerous theological impostors proliferated, peddling hollow assurances from their fabricated

deities, while also endeavoring to distort Paul's teachings¹⁷ by proclaiming that the Day of the Lord had already dawned!¹⁸ Such deceitful assertions carried grave implications for the Thessalonians, as the prospect of being left behind would have

¹⁷ A.T. Robertson, [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Th 2:15.

¹⁸ Gordon D. Fee, [*The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 305.

left them despairing amidst their persecution, bereft of hope for deliverance. Paul tells the Thessalonians to “not flinch regardless of potential threats”¹⁹ and deceptive tongues of clever rhetoric but to instead hold fast to the teachings passed on to them by word of mouth and letter (15). Paul fervently urged them to transmit orally the teachings imparted during his missionary voyage to Thessalonica, along with the contents of his letters, emphasizing that these were not mere 'human words' (1 Thessalonians 2:13), but rather, they were 'Spirit-inspired' and 'God-breathed' words!²⁰ We should not be alarmed that Paul says to pass down oral tradition. In our day this would lead to great distortions in the truth but in the Hellenistic culture it was common practice²¹ that had far greater accuracy than today, furthermore, the New Testament would soon be fully written correcting any possible “minor” distortions that might have added to Paul’s theology!

Like in Paul’s day the church faces enormous pressure to venture away from the truth of God’s word. We live in a fallen world where so many divergent and often conflicting opinions bombard people day in and day out! The search for truth on the ever-changing sands of culture leads to great instability and the idea that absolute truth does not exist! As we seek the face of God in such turbulent times there is always the temptation to

¹⁹ Daniel M. Gurtner, [“2 Thessalonians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 633.

²⁰ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 49.

“interpret” the word of God differently to “breathe new life into the church” by making it more relevant to our fast-changing, me focused environment.²² To justify bad theology many quote Apostle Paul who said, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul was not saying to change the message but merely to use different ways of communicating the truth!



For the church to make a profound difference in society, believers are not to seek their friendship by imitating their evil ways but instead must stand firm upon the word of a sovereign God! The fallen of this world do not need us to throw them a pleasure seeking, self-indulgence anchor so that they might swoon the gates of hell but instead the life-giving words of Christ that offer them grace, mercy, forgiveness, and inclusion into His family! In our modern efforts to dilute the impactful message of John the Baptist, urging people to "repent for the kingdom of God is near," we, as ambassadors of Christ, have inadvertently relegated ourselves to the sidelines of society,

²¹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 557.

²² Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 239.

merely one voice among many. If we genuinely desire to illuminate the darkness and witness a revival in our churches, we must adopt a counterintuitive approach: looking backward to



move forward.²³ Central to this paradigm shift is recognizing God's truth as supreme, transcending all other voices, including our own. Only by embracing the authority of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit can we effectively convey the message of Jesus to the world. It is only through the faithful proclamation of His words that the seeds of righteousness can take root and flourish in the hearts of others.

²³ Mark Howell et al., [*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 239.

²⁴ Jay E. Adams, [*Romans, Philippians, I Thessalonians, and II Thessalonians*](#), The Christian Counselor's Commentary (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 230.

²⁵ Gene L. Green, [*The Letters to the Thessalonians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 331.

²⁶ Michael Holmes, [*1 and 2 Thessalonians*](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 255.

Words of Encouragement

Looking out upon this vast world of pleasure-seeking, me enamored individuals who persecute those who live their lives worthy of the Gospel message, can be quite frightening! With giant specks of sins and the bondage of decay of this world clouding our sight, it is very difficult to stand firm and experience hope and unspeakable joy as we strive to trust and obey so that we might be holy as He is holy. Apostle Paul finishes this part of his letter with a beautiful benediction of encouragement that is so desperately needed²⁴ to the believer in “midst of the persecutions and their battle against erroneous teaching.”²⁵ Our stability and steadfast obedience to the word and His will, for Paul, does not come from the “goodness” of the believer²⁶ but only from the eternal love of God!²⁷ He who demonstrated His love through His election of us fallen image-bearers, during His incarnation (John 3:16), and by atoning for our sins on the cross (Romans 5:8),²⁸ is the only means by which the heart that seeks eternity can be encouraged because it gets to “receive divine moral exhortation.”²⁹ It is by His grace and sovereignty that the believer is able to endure intense

²⁷ John R. W. Stott, [*The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 180.

²⁸ Gene L. Green, [*The Letters to the Thessalonians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 331.

²⁹ Gene L. Green, [*The Letters to the Thessalonians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 333.

persecution and live as citizens of heaven in the present, conforming our thoughts, words and deeds to His righteous standard of holiness. By keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus we receive comfort and unspeakable joy that is “eternal and transcends death, offering us something more than the grave as the goal of life!”³⁰ So, when life throws you into a turbulent sea of anguish, pain, and uncertainty do not fear but bow low and look high for very soon we will go home and be with the Lord!

³⁰ Gene L. Green, [*The Letters to the Thessalonians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 332.