

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Chosen and Called

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Key verse: “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Confused about the Second Coming of Christ, under attack by false teachers, persecuted for their faith—the believers in Thessalonica had every reason to be discouraged. So, the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to clarify the doctrine of Christ’s return, to counter the influence of false teachers, and to encourage the believers to “stand firm and hold fast” (v. 15).

If we are to stand firm in Christ, we too need sound teaching and spiritual encouragement. So, let’s look at *four ways Paul described the Thessalonian believers*, in 2:13-17, as encouragement to “stand firm and hold fast”:

1. “Beloved” – Paul describes believers as “brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord” (v. 13). When we are discouraged and our faith is failing, we need to remind ourselves that we are the Lord’s “beloved.” God through Christ has loved us with an everlasting love. We are the object of our Lord’s undying affections. We are His “beloved.”

Alister McGrath tells a story about his aunt, who died at age 80 or so. She had never married. As her family cleared out her possessions, they came across a battered old photograph of a handsome young man. The aunt, it turned out, had fallen madly in love as a young girl. That romance ended tragically. She had never loved anyone else. And she had kept, for the rest of her life, the photograph of the man she had loved and who had loved her.

Why? Partly to remind herself that she had once been loved by someone. She knew that, as the years went by, it would be easy to forget how someone had once regarded her as his everything. It could all have seemed a dream, an illusion, something she had invented in her old age—except for the witness of that faded photograph. It reminded her that she had been someone’s “beloved.” (from *Doubling: Growing through the Uncertainties of Faith* by Alister McGrath)

If you ever have days when you feel like nobody in the world loves you, remember that there is always One who does. You are the Lord’s “beloved.” Paul

reminds believers of this truth and so encourages them to “stand firm and hold fast.”

2. Saved. To encourage the believers at Thessalonica, Paul also reminds them that God chose them “as the first fruits for salvation” (v. 13). Through faith in Jesus Christ, they have been saved.

For them, salvation through Christ involved being among the first people—“the first fruits”—to hear and respond to the gospel. For us, the fact that God has saved us from sin and given us life abundant and eternal ought to provide encouragement to “stand firm and hold fast.”

What a blessing and what a miracle it is to be saved!

John Peterson wrote a beautiful song about that miracle. The chorus says:

*It took a miracle
To put the stars in place.
It took a miracle
To hang the world in space.
But when He saved my soul,
Cleansed and made me whole,
It took a miracle of love and grace!*

3. Sanctified. Paul also reminds the Thessalonians, “God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit...” (v. 13)

When you received Jesus Christ as your Savior, you were saved. God forgave your sins and gave you new life. While our salvation begins with that decision, there is a sense in which our salvation is also a *process*. “Sanctification by the Spirit” is the process, following our initial decision to receive Christ, through which God grows us into Christ-likeness. This process of sanctification is a lifelong journey of change and growth.

The Bible teaches that God often uses our trials for our sanctification: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4). Knowing that our trials and hurts are working for good in this way, we—like the Thessalonian believers—can find encouragement to “stand firm and hold fast.”

Paul encouraged his friends in Thessalonica by reminding them that, in Christ, they are *beloved, saved, sanctified, and finally...*

4. Destined for glory. “For this purpose,” writes Paul, “he called you...so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). The Bible teaches that, in eternity, Christ’s followers will have a share in His glory and will rule and reign with Him.

Lee Eclov shared the following account: “I’ll never forget something I saw close to 20 years ago when I walked into the Smithsonian’s National Museum of

American Art in Washington, D.S. Just inside the door, in an alcove, was an arrangement called 'The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nation's Millennium General Assembly.' There were 180 pieces in the arrangement—from tables to chairs to small decorative items—all pulled together by James Hampton, a quiet, virtually unknown janitor from the D.C. area. Hampton simply wanted to depict God's throne room.

"This extraordinary collection had been found in his garage after he died in 1964. No one knew he had been working on it from some 20 years. All these pieces were made from cast-off items—old furniture, gold and aluminum foil from store displays, bottles, cigarette boxes, wine bottles, rolls of kitchen foil, used light bulbs, cardboard, insulation board, construction paper, desk blotters, and sheets of transparent plastic—all precariously held together with glue, tape, tacks, and pins.

"On a bulletin board in the garage he had copied this verse from Proverbs 29:18: 'Where there is no vision the people perish.' He believed people needed a vision of God's glory, so he set out, single-handedly, to give it to them."

There are times for each of us when, like the Thessalonian believers, we need encouragement to "stand firm and hold fast." In those times, we would do well to remember who we are in Christ—*beloved, saved, sanctified, and destined for glory!*

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