

Fact Sheet for **“Words of Encouragement”**
2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Pastor Bob Singer
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ESV 2:13 ¶ **But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.** ¹⁴ **To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Notice the very similar words Paul used earlier in 1:3. Paul has no criticisms of the Thessalonian believers. Instead his goal is to encourage them.

chose – “select” or “pick” In the NT this word is used only here and in Philippians 1:22. Paul wrote that God *selected* the Thessalonian believers as the firstfruits to be saved. They were the first believers in Thessalonica. God also **called** them through the gospel preached by Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Now don't miss noticing that it is God who takes the initiative in bringing people to salvation in Christ. There is one... long... sentence that Paul wrote to another church that highlights this (Eph. 1:3-14). As you read this think about what parts God does and what parts we do. Are you a Christian? If so, then God also called you through the gospel. You are special to Him, as were the Thessalonian believers.

Now what does it mean that we will **obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**? Think about 2 Thess. 1:10-12. This glory is both present and future.

¹⁵ **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.**

stand firm – Remember they were being persecuted. It may have been a strong temptation to back away from Christ in the face of this, but Paul encouraged them to stand firm in their faith and the outworking of it in their lives.

hold to the traditions – “Tradition!” (from Fiddler on the Roof) The word translated **traditions** doesn't refer to the traditions of men as in Mark 7:1-23. In this passage from Mark “tradition” is modified by other words (“of the elders” and “of men”). In 2 Thess. 2:15 it is not. Instead it is here a reference to Christian doctrine, teaching, and instruction that was handed down from Paul to the Thessalonians. This is also the meaning in 1 Corinthians 11:2.

Today we have something that Paul and the Thessalonians did not have... a completed NT, as well as a copy of the OT. Christian doctrine is not handed down from generation to generation any more. It is found in the words of the Bible. The challenge today is in learning how to interpret well.

We may also think of Christian “traditions” as ways of doing things that are not taught in the Bible but are just the way we come to do them over the years. For Paul the “traditions” were those things that make for good Christian doctrine and the resulting life choices that are pleasing to God. It went beyond what they intellectually knew and clearly included their application of that truth to life. These thoughts were echoed in the next two verses.

¹⁶ ¶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Do you see Paul’s emphasis on their godly behavior and words? He had taught them about sexual purity (1 Thess. 4:1-8), about brotherly love (1 Thess. 4:9-10), and about a diligent work ethic (1 Thess. 4:11-12). To be sure he taught them so much more about how to live to please God. These were the traditions Paul spoke of.

Living for Christ is so much more than just having believed in Him and knowing what the Bible calls us to. It is putting what we know about God and His desires for us to work in our lives as we make choices every day. This may be easy at times and terribly challenging at others depending on our past habits.

Paul also wrote about sanctification in verse 13. The word **sanctification** means “made holy”. When Paul mentions **sanctification by the Spirit** is he referring to the fact that we *have been* (NASB) sanctified in Christ (as in Acts 26:16-18)? Or does Paul mean that as we choose to listen to and live by the Holy Spirit’s nudging’s we become more and more holy in our behavior? In my thinking the answer is “Yes!” Both are true. God has not only called us to salvation, but also to good doctrine (truth), holy behavior and holy words.

Paul now asks them for prayer, but goes right back to his encouragement of them.

^{3:1} Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith (noun). ³ But the Lord is faithful (adjective). He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

God will work in you to this end.

⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

steadfastness – endurance, perseverance

Here’s a spiritual check-up.

Is God calling you to salvation?

Are you seeking to learn more of God’s Word?

Are you listening to the Holy Spirit and pursuing holy living?

Are you standing steadfast in the Lord?