

# The Family of God: Standing Firm

February 06, 2011

Scripture: [2 Thess. 2:13-17](#)

Series: [Staying the Course When You're Tired of The Battle \(6/10\)](#)

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So then, brothers, stand firm... (2 Thessalonians 2:15, NIV)

Antichrist is coming. The whole world will be deceived. The spirit that animates him is already at work in the world. What then is the message to Christians?

There is a view of the world that looks at world events like this and says, "It's all down to you. You're the last line of defense. So you'd better not mess up." There's a kind of preaching that rolls the weight of the world onto the shoulders of Christian believers. It places people under an intolerable burden, a burden you cannot possibly bear.

But this chapter ends, not with an intolerable burden, but with a wonderful statement of confidence in Almighty God. These verses give us wisdom for discerning the battle. We know that we're up against dark forces that are already at work in the world. Now God wants us to know how we're to stand firm in the darkest days of our lives.

"Stand firm." That's clear enough, but how do you do that?

## **Remember who you are in Christ**

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers... (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

What does Paul do when he sees the secret power of sin at work in the world? He gives thanks for the church! Why? Because while Satan is working, Jesus Christ is also at work. What is the work of Christ in the world? "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

What should you do when you see the world getting darker, evil getting stronger? Thank God for the church. Value what Christ is doing in His people. Out of this dark and difficult passage on the mystery of sin in the world, Paul launches into one of the most wonderful expressions of thanksgiving for the church in all of the New Testament.

## *In Jesus Christ You Are...*

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. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

### **1. ...Loved.**

brothers loved by the Lord... (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

Slow down and try to take in this greatest of truths—God loves you. No matter how dark the world around you becomes. Spurgeon says helpfully that this is more than pity. It is a wonderful truth that God pities us and feels sorry for us. But God loves you!

It is more than compassion. This is more than benevolence. It is a wonderful truth that the heart of God is moved by our plight, and that He should do something about it, but this is more than compassion. God loves you.

The quality of love you experience in life is determined by the capacity of the people who love you. Some people have the capacity to love more deeply than others. To be loved is good. To be loved deeply is a great blessing.

Think about the capacity of Almighty God to love. Then try to take this in: God loves you. You are loved by the Lord! You will spend eternity trying to take in the wonder of this love. So, start now. Brothers, sisters, you are loved by the Lord.

### **2. ...Chosen.**

from the beginning God chose you... (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

He is writing to ordinary Christians. This is something to make us worship and wonder. The Christian knows this, not only from the Bible, but from his or her own experience.

When you lay hold of Christ by faith, it will not be long before you know that he has laid hold of you. You'll begin to experience what Jesus said to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

These Christians knew that they had been chosen. How did they know that? Because they'd believed. That's the sign that they had been chosen. This truth is given to believers precisely because we need it to stand firm in the darkest days.

My confidence in hard times rests not in the fact that I have laid hold of Christ, but that he has laid hold of me. My little faith holding on to him isn't enough in the dark days of life. I need to know that his mighty hand is holding onto me.

### **3. ...Saved.**

God chose you to be saved... (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

We saw last time that the world is deceived, perishing, refusing to love the truth, delighting in wickedness, under a powerful delusion, believing the lie and ultimately condemned. God loves you and chose you to be saved from that! How?

#### **4. ...Sanctified**

through the sanctifying work of the Spirit... (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

When we come across this word “sanctified” many Christians immediately think to themselves, “This is one thing that I am not!” We associate the word “sanctified” with being saintly or holy or pure. But the word “sanctified” can have two different meanings, “made holy” or “set apart.”

So that you will always remember the lesser known meaning, I’ve brought along a bag of candy. I’m going to take some out for myself, then I’ll hand the rest out after the service. These ones are mine. The rest you can have.

Do you know what I just did? I “sanctified” these candies. I laid hold of them for myself. When I took these candies for myself, I “sanctified” them. I claimed them. I set them apart from the others.

That is what God has done for you in Christ. He has said, “I claim you for my own. I am going to reproduce the very image of my Son in you.” What greater privilege could there be than that? You say, “Wait a minute, who are the ones that God has claimed for himself? Who are the ones God has sanctified?” Those who’ve believed the truth.

#### **5. ...Believing**

through belief in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

These people believed. These things are true of everyone who believes, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). To all who believe, Paul says, “Know this. You are loved by God, chosen from the beginning to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.” How did they come to believe?

#### **6. ...Called**

He called you to this through our gospel... (2 Thessalonians 2:14)

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died as the sacrifice for our sins, and that he rose from the dead to bring us new life. God calls people through the Gospel. That is why the Gospel must always be central to the ministry of the church.

As you believe the Gospel, all these gifts are yours. You will find that you are loved and chosen and saved and sanctified, through believing the Gospel. It is through the Gospel that God lays hold of you.

## **7. ...Glorified**

that you might share the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ... (2 Thessalonians 2:14)

The ultimate outcome of God's redeeming purpose is not only that you will see Christ's glory, you will share Christ's glory. You will be glorified in Christ forever.

The whole magnificent range of God's redeeming purpose in Christ is set out here in two verses. James Denney calls this "a system of theology in miniature."<sup>1</sup>

### **For visual learners**

For those who are visual learners, it might be helpful to turn this list into a diagram. These verses describe the miracle of our salvation.

Salvation is the big overarching word used in the Bible. "God chose you to be saved..." (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Salvation is like a treasure chest of God's redeeming work in which God places the priceless jewels of justification, sanctification, reconciliation, adoption, forgiveness and glorification.

How are we saved? Our salvation comes through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). God calls us through the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for us.

What lies behind the Gospel? Why is there a Christ who was crucified? Why is there a Christ who is risen? God set his love on you. God chose you from the beginning.

Why did Jesus Christ come into the world and die on the cross? There is only one explanation. The love of God, who has chosen to redeem a people for Himself, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son..." (John 3:16). That is why Jesus came into the world. This is why he died on the cross and rose from the grave.

What is the fruit of his death and resurrection, proclaimed in the Gospel? The Spirit sanctifies and the sinner believes. This is what had happened in the lives of these people. This is the miracle that's happened in you, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today.

How is it that you're here today as someone who believes in Jesus Christ? Is it just your background? Thousands, who have the same background as you, reject Him completely. Is it just your friends? Thousands have friends like you and never come to faith in Christ.

Your faith in Christ is the visible fruit of an amazing work of God that began in eternity, rolled through the cross of Calvary and through the empty tomb, and is being put into effect by the Holy Spirit, even on the darkest day of your life.

Do you see this wonderful glimpse of the three persons of the Godhead? The Father loves you and He has chosen you. The Son died for you and rose for you. The Spirit sanctified you and brought you to faith in Christ. All of this, God has done with the purpose that you might, for all eternity, share the glory of His Son Jesus Christ forever.

I want you to get hold of this marvelous truth today. I want you to say this out loud: "In Christ, I am loved, chosen, saved, sanctified, believing, called and glorified."

### *Now... Stand Firm!*

So then, brothers, stand firm... (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

If you took out the massive truths we just looked at, then we would all be overwhelmed. If the message was that the world is getting worse, and Satan is rampant, and godless people are deceived, and antichrist is coming and it's up to you to stand firm, we would all feel completely hopeless.

Maybe that is how you feel. When you look at what you are up against, you feel completely helpless. You are surrounded by darkness. The battle is intense for you. You feel overwhelmed.

Drink in the truth of who you are in Christ. Nourish your soul here. Find strength for the battle in this reality. You are loved by the Lord! God chose you from the beginning! You are saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and by believing the truth. God has called you through the Gospel. Your future is to share the everlasting glory of Christ. Now, hear this: Stand firm!

### **Receive what you need from Christ**

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Paul teaches and then he prays. These two belong together. Since God loves you—he chose you, he saved you, he sanctified you, he called you through the Gospel, he brought you to faith, and he destined you to share in Christ's glory—so come before him with confidence and receive what you need from Christ! Remember who you're coming to and pray in the light of the truth so that you may experience its power.

In a few moments we will come to the Lord's table. This is a great place for you to receive what you need from Christ. You can use the words of this prayer at the communion table

today. May the Lord Jesus... encourage (or comfort) your hearts. May the Lord Jesus... strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Notice the direct personal involvement of Christ, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself... encourage your hearts...” (2 Thessalonians 2:16). There is a direct ministry of Christ to bring courage and strength to your heart when you face your darkest hour.

When you pray for comfort and strength, remember who you’re asking. This Lord Jesus is the one who gave us “eternal encouragement and good hope” (2:17). How did he do that? On the cross and through his resurrection.

Do you need comfort? Lift up your eyes and look at the cross. The Son of God is hanging there. The voices of hell mock him. People laugh at him in scorn. He is the man of sorrows. He is acquainted with grief. He knows what it is to suffer. He knows what it is to face these dark powers. Think what comfort you could find in him!

Do you need strength? Lift up your eyes and look at the empty tomb. Jesus Christ has endured. He has conquered. He has risen. Think what strength you could find in him!

May this Christ, who knows what it is to suffer, comfort your heart. May this Christ, who triumphed over the grave, strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Here’s the message, brothers and sisters in Christ. You live in a dark world. You battle with dark powers. Remember this: God loves you, he chose you, he saved you, he sanctified you, he called you to faith through the Gospel, and you will share the glory of his Son forever. Now, in the light of this, stand firm! And to this end may Jesus Christ himself give you comfort and strength. Amen

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<sup>1</sup> James Denney, “*The Epistle to the Thessalonians*,” p. 342, Hodder & Stoughton, 1892