

The Effectual Call of God

Call to Worship: Ephesians 1:3-14

1st Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

Hymn Insert- *By Faith*

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

Introduction:

Paul has just dealt with the false teaching that has begun to make its way into the church, which claimed that the Lord Jesus Christ may have already returned. He did this, so as to preserve the hope that he had given the Thessalonians in his first letter, as they were suffering ongoing persecution, even to the extent that they lost some of their beloved brethren to martyrdom. Their very hope was bound to the final coming of Christ, where the Thessalonians would be gathered together with those who had fallen asleep (died), to be ushered into glory with Christ. And furthermore, the enemies of Christ, who were persecuting the Thessalonians would be destroyed upon His return.

And so, Paul here strongly affirmed that Christ had not yet returned. And he further assured them of this by reminding them of two very significant, large scale events that had to precede the coming of Christ. First, a great "falling away" had to take place, where a large portion of the church would apostatize from the faith. And then, rising out of this great apostasy would be the "man of sin," who would make bold blasphemous claims and reek utter havoc on the church. Ultimately, this man of sin (this "lawless one") would be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming.

The mystery of lawlessness was already at work in Paul's day, setting the stage for the falling away and the revealing of the man of sin. However, something was presently restraining, preventing the man of sin from rising up any sooner than his appointed time.

Last time, we saw that ultimately Satan was behind the rising up and reign of this man of sin, and he would deceive many into believing his lies and following him. However, those who are deceived are ultimately victims of their own sinful desires, since they reject the true gospel and have pleasure in unrighteousness. God, therefore, sends them a strong delusion, giving them

over to the deceptive influences of the man of sin. And so, their judgment is well deserved and their eternal condemnation is certain.

Having exposed such frightening truths, tied to the wicked acts of Satan, Paul then moves on, to again encourage the persevering Thessalonians, who by their ongoing faithfulness, exhibit the fact that God has chosen to save them and to deliver them from the judgment that will be experienced by those who are deceived by Satan and his man of sin. Here, Paul sets forth a comforting contrast, as it were, so that, as he cautions them against embracing the false teachings surrounding the return of Christ, at the same time, he can encourage them to continue to persevere; to press on without looking back. Paul here exhibits the skill of a great spiritual surgeon, coating his warning with encouragement, so as not to overwhelm an already suffering people. And in all of this, he never compromises the truth. He just uses it wisely, to extract the cancerous heresy, while exhorting them forward in grace!

I. Election (vs. 13)

Paul then begins verse 13 with the word, "but," indicating here that he is about to contrast something with what he has just said. He was just talking about those who perish, who fall into the deceptive trap of the man of sin, having rejected the truth because of their pleasure in unrighteousness. Contrary to the condemnation of those individuals, Paul now states, "But we are bound (under obligation; we can't help but...) to give thanks to God always for you, brethren..." Back in chapter 1:3, Paul had already expressed how they were bound to give thanks to God always for the exceedingly growing faith of the Thessalonians and for their abounding love toward each other, but here, he is compelled to thank God again, having to do with something that contrasts what he has just said about those who are condemned...

"We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth..."

And here, brethren, we note three profound realities, which set the great contrast between the Thessalonians and those who are perishing:

1) First, Paul attaches a most comforting clause to the word, "brethren," here, so as to highlight a significant reality, upon which, all that follows, finds its foundation. He calls them, "brethren," and then adds the qualifier, "beloved of the Lord." "We give thanks for you, our brothers and sisters in Christ; you who are presently suffering for your faith but are those who are loved by God..."

This is similar to Paul's glorious encouragement to the Ephesians, when he states in that "chock full of awe" run-on statement in chapter one, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him *in love*, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved" (vss. 3-6).

And so, Paul, with that little added clause, reminds them of the fact that they are the objects of God's love. And then, he moves on to develop his contrast, which also undeniably attests to the fact that God truly loves them. He gave them the architect drawings and now he begins to lay the concrete.

2) We are bound to thank God always, beloved brethren, "because God from the beginning chose you for salvation..." Here, we have that irrefutable doctrine of "election" stated in the clearest of terms. Again, this contrasts those whom God condemns, sending them strong delusion, leaving them to their unrighteous desires. Paul thanks God that these beloved brethren from Thessalonica were chosen by God for salvation...when? "From the beginning." From the very foundation of the world, God, in Christ, set His love upon these brethren, and chose to save them from the curse of their sins, freeing them from the bondage, which holds the rest of the world in captivity. They are part of the true Israel of God, which God redeems out of Egypt, as it were, (by the blood of the Lamb) that He might lead them into His heavenly Promised Land!

The assertion that this elective grace is anything less than God's free and gracious choice; to strap on any notion that God first looked down the tunnel of time and saw that the Thessalonians would, of their own free will, choose Christ, absolutely mangles and brutalizes the very glory of what is clearly stated here. It is to read into the text, what is nowhere to be found,

so as to suit a system of theology that denies God's right and freedom to be God, while crediting fallen, spiritually dead men with an ability that they simply do not have.

3) Paul then reveals the means, by which, God brought the Thessalonians into the salvation, unto which God chose them. And again, we find the power of God, exhibited on behalf of His elect, which contrasts them from those who perish in their sins.

"From the beginning, *(He)* chose you for salvation *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth...*"

How does God bring His elect people to inherit the salvation unto which He has elected them? Paul mentions two means, neither of which, is attainable to the natural man, because the natural man (in Adam) has no compelling inclination toward such things.

i - "Through sanctification by the Spirit." What exactly does Paul mean here? Here, Paul highlights that work of immediate sanctification, which the Holy Spirit brings about in the hearts and lives of dead sinners, which ultimately leads to their progressive sanctification. By the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, God graciously breathes spiritual life into the spiritually dead sinner. And in doing this, he sets His people apart; He sanctifies them out of this fallen world and brings them into His glorious kingdom. God enlightens His elect people; He opens their eyes to the truth, by means of the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit, so that they will be brought into union with Jesus Christ by faith, leading them on a course where they will be made more and more like the Christ with whom they became united. [Contrast with vs. 12]

This brings us to the second means God uses for bringing His elect into His glorious salvation.

ii - "And belief in the truth." What truth? The truth of the gospel, of course! And you see, the order here is critical. The sanctifying work of the Spirit, as a whole, is what empowers sinners to obtain salvation in every respect. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, sinners would never believe the truth of the gospel, nor would they be affected by that truth, nor would they be progressively sanctified (conformed to the image of Christ) by that truth. The Spirit is completely operative in every aspect of the elect's salvation, or they never begin, progress and complete their course of salvation. [Contrast with vs. 10-12]

And so, as God reaches into this lost, dead and condemned world (driven by His incomprehensible love for some), by His Spirit, He regenerates and enlightens His people, sets them apart, opens their eyes to the truth, causes them to believe the truth, converts them by that truth, progressively sanctifies them through that truth, and ultimately glorifies them in that truth. Again, all of this contrasts the delusion that He sends upon those who are not His, who willingly reject the truth, and do not overcome their hardness and deception. And ultimately, the only difference between the condemned and the saved, both of which deserve condemnation, is grace. Paul puts it this way in Romans 9:15-18, "For He (God) says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.' Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

You see, out of the same fallen lump of clay, God has mercy on some and leaves others to continue to pursue their own unrighteous passions. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-13, in many ways, exhibits (in a very tangible way), the truth of Romans 9. Notice, Paul doesn't say, "I am so thankful that you, unlike those who are deceived and condemned, have made a decision for Jesus." No, he says, "I thank God that in His decision to show mercy, that He has done so to you, evidencing His preordained calling of you, by sanctifying you through the Spirit and bringing you to understand and believe the truth. He has made operative what He had planned before time in your salvation, by rescuing you out of the world (sanctifying you) through the power of the Holy Spirit, causing you to believe the gospel, which is the gateway into union with Christ, to obtain all of the blessings incorporated in God's free salvation, purchased by Christ!"

II. The Effectual Call (vs. 14)

Notice, verse 14, confirms what we have just considered, "He chose you to be sanctified by the Spirit and belief in the truth, *to which He called you (to which He effectually called you) by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ!*"

God chose them unto salvation from the beginning. He preordained the effectual means of accomplishing and bringing them into that salvation. And He actually brought them into that salvation via the effectual call of the gospel, which has brought them to the place where they would wholly access and obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Being united to Christ by faith (a Spirit wrought faith), they obtain every spiritual blessing in Christ! As Paul (and his companions) preached the gospel to the Thessalonians (when they were there), the Spirit of God spoke through Paul, empowering His proclamation of the gospel (and regenerating the hearts of the Thessalonians), such that the Thessalonians would hear and believe what was preached, unto the obtaining of God's free salvation, in accordance with His pre-time plan. In this way, God effectually called them, through Paul and his companions. Paul thanked God for doing this, because Paul recognized that apart from the invisible and yet real power of God, Paul's preaching does absolutely nothing to bring the Thessalonians to repentance and faith in Christ. He knows, like in Ezekiel's vision, he preaches to very dry bones. The Spirit of God must give life, and He must empower the messenger in the proclamation of the gospel message, and He must empower the listener to hear and believe it!

III. Therefore (vs. 15)

And as is typical of Paul, having provided the "indicative" teaching as a compelling motivation to act, he now directs them to specific actions, as an appropriate response to the glory of what he has just revealed. He has excited them with divine truth, and now he wants to lasso the energy that ought to come out of that excitement, so as to direct it toward a specific avenue of obedience.

Verse 15, "Therefore (in light of the glorious things I have just said; in light of the unmerited privilege you have been freely given in Christ, being spared the condemnation you rightly deserve), brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle."

"Continue to stay the course; continue to persevere; continue to press forward; keep on keeping on, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Continue to hold fast to the doctrines that we have taught you (especially surrounding Christ and

His gospel; concerning His life, death, resurrection, ascension and His coming return). Don't let go of all that we have declared to you, when we were with you (by our preaching and teaching) and when we were apart from you (by written letter). Stand fast and cling to the truth! Don't let anyone take you off course by physical force or by destructive heresies!"

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through our text for this morning, brethren, let us now conclude our time by considering a few closing thoughts and applications:

- 1) God loves you, brethren! You are beloved of the living God, in spite of your sin!
- 2) God chose you before the foundation of the world!
- 3) God chose to sanctify you by His Spirit! He preordained to pull you out of the mire of this world and its corruption!
- 4) God opened your eyes to the truth, by His Spirit!
- 5) God progressively sanctifies you by His Spirit! He will finish what He has begun!
- 6) God irresistibly called you! You heard and believed the Gospel, because God's call to you was not simply a general call. It was made effectual, by His Holy Spirit! The difference between you and all who reject the truth, is bound up in one word...grace!

How do these realities affect you? What can we ever complain about? Stand fast! Cling to the truth!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25