

2 Thessalonians (7): Thanksgiving to God for our Salvation

The Apostle Paul had corrected the errant beliefs of the Christians in this church regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. They had believed that the Lord's return was immanent, but the apostle told them that they were mistaken, for two events would occur before the Lord's return. There would first be a great falling away from the truth, an apostasy of many, and, second, the man of lawlessness would be revealed. This "lawless one" would be empowered by satan, who would enable him to deceive "with all power and false signs and wonders", those who "had pleasure in unrighteousness" (3:10f). His followers will have refused to love the truth and be saved; therefore, God Himself would bring His judgment upon them. He would send them "a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned" (3:11f). But in contrast to them, who are condemned in their sin, who receive God's justice administered to them, Paul declared that he was compelled to thank God for these Christians in this church, for due to God's grace alone, He had granted them salvation. Let us read Paul's words in **2 Thessalonians 2:13-17**:

¹³But 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.

¹⁴To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

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

Whereas the followers of the man of lawlessness receive justice for their sins, Christians experience God's mercy in that He saves them through His grace. Lawless ones and saved ones are no different in that all are sinners. But God has determined that He will punish some for what they deserve, and He has decreed that He will save all others from sin by His grace, even them whom He had loved from the beginning.

As we look over these verses, we see in our English Standard Version (ESV) that there are four sentences set forth in two paragraphs.¹ The New King James Version (NKJV), however, has these two paragraphs expressed in three sentences, in that verses 13 and 14 are one sentence rather than two. The modern Greek text agrees with the sentence division of the NKJV. It asserts that Paul originally penned these verses expressing his thoughts in three sentences, or three main points in these two paragraphs. If we follow their understanding, we may propose this three point outline of our passage:

- 1. Giving thanks to God for our salvation (vs. 13, 14)**
- 2. Rendering faithful obedience to God's Word in response to our salvation by His grace (v. 15)**
- 3. Praying to God that He would comfort and establish our hearts (vs. 16, 17)**

Let us consider carefully these matters.

I. Giving thanks to God for our salvation (vs. 13, 14)

¹ The four sentences in the ESV are as follows: (1) v. 13, (2) v. 14, (3) v. 15, (4) vs. 16 and 17.

We read in verses 13 and 14, “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. ¹⁴To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

A. First, we read the main statement of Paul, “*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you...*” Paul thanked God continually for all the ones that the Lord brought to salvation through his ministry. This exhortation of the apostle is consistent with his frequently expressed gratefulness to God for His work of grace in His people. He was grateful to God for His work in the *local churches* in which he ministered. Consider the following statements. Paul wrote to the church at **Rome**:

“First, *I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all*, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” (Rom. 1:8)

Paul wrote to the church at **Philippi**:

“*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you*, ⁴always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.” (Phil. 1:3-7)

Similarly, Paul wrote to the church at **Colossae**:

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. (Col. 1:3-8)

But Paul was also grateful to God for *individuals* who had become Christians due to the grace of God. He wrote to **Timothy**:

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, ⁴greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, ⁵*when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you...*” (2 Tim. 1:3-5)

He also expressed his thanksgiving to God for the work of His saving grace in **Philemon**:

⁴*I thank my God*, making mention of you always in my prayers, ⁵hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, ⁶that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you¹ in Christ Jesus. (Phm. 1:4-6)

The cause of our salvation lies with God alone and therefore we ought always to give thanks to God for His mercy, His kindness, His power, His wisdom, and His love for us in saving us from our sin by Jesus Christ.

Matthew Henry tied Paul's thankfulness for their salvation to God with God having preserved them from the apostasy of those who believed the lie of the man of lawlessness:

Here observe, I. The consolation the Thessalonians might take against the terrors of this apostasy, vs. 13 and 14. For they were chosen to salvation, and called to the obtaining of glory. Note, When we hear of the apostasy of many, it is matter of great comfort and joy that there is a remnant according to the election of grace which does and shall persevere; and especially we should rejoice if we have reason to hope that we are of that number. The apostle reckoned himself bound in duty to be thankful to God on this account: *We are bound to give thanks to God always for you.* He had often given thanks on their behalf, and he is still abounding in thanksgiving for them; and there was good reason, because they were beloved by the Lord, as appeared in this matter—their security from apostatizing.

B. Paul expressed the high regard that God had for them in that He loved them. He wrote, “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, *brothers beloved by the Lord*” (v. 13). We know from the Holy Scriptures that God is love. He is, therefore, loving to all. He is even loving to those who are living in defiance of His laws in His world. He is loving to His enemies (as we should be toward ours). But whereas God is loving to all, He does not love all people. He loves His own, those whom He has chosen in eternity to be saved from their sins. Of His people, and His people only, does God declare as He did through Jeremiah: “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, *I have loved you with an everlasting love*; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (Jer. 31:3).

There exists a widespread misunderstanding among many Christians about the nature of the love of God. There is a tendency for folks to assume that God loves all people alike, whether Christian or not, but the Bible does not teach this. This is an important matter. Wrong understanding about the love of God leads to false assumptions and wrong conclusions about the nature of God and His will. Some suggest that because God is love, that He is easy to appease with respect to sin. Their weak and shallow concept of divine love results in them justifying sinful behavior in themselves and others. A wrong view of the love of God frequently results in the error of sinful license. But when we consider the nature of God's love toward His people as it is in fact presented in Scripture, we will see that it leads to holy living, not loose living.

God reveals quite clearly and quite frequently in His Word that He has a love for His people that is unique and special, a special love for them that He does not have for the world. We read that Christ loves His church, and gave Himself for it. John 13:1, “Then Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, *having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*”

We could show this truth from any number of places in God's Word, but let us look at one passage in particular, **Romans 8**. It spells out quite clearly that God has a love for His people that is bound up in Jesus Christ. His love for them results in Him bringing them to receive salvation. Let us begin reading with Romans 8:28.

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He *predestined*, these He also *called*; whom He called, these He also *justified*; and whom He justified, these He also *glorified*.

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us

all things? ³³Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from *the love of Christ*? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through *Him who loved us*. ³⁸For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us *from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*. (Rom. 8:28-39)

Here we see that there is a love of God that is found *in Christ Jesus*, a love that He has toward His people. God's love for His people is an everlasting love. It is a redemptive love. It is a love that moves God to draw effectually His chosen people to save them from their sin. God's love for His people is of such a nature and to such a degree that He gives all for His own, even His own Son, so as to secure their everlasting wellbeing. Because God loves His people, He saves them from sin and glorifies them before Him.

The love of God for His people is seen in the working of His sovereign power to save His people. We often read Romans 8:28. It is a familiar verse. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” But what Paul is emphasizing here is that God in His sovereignty controls all things for the benefit of His people. Because He loved them, He purposed to save them.

This passage in Romans 8 teaches us that **God's love for His people is from eternity--“For whom He foreknew** (Rom. 8:29a). It did not come into being in time. We love God, but it is due to the fact that He first loved us, and He did so long before we ever born. He first loved us before the foundation of the world. His love for His people was from eternity. We can say this for the Scriptures tell us that we enjoy the love of God that was in His Son from eternity. We read of this love in John 17:23 and 24, in which our Lord was speaking to His Father:

I in them, and You in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that *You sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me*. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world

When the Bible sets forth God's love for us before time, it often does so through the word, “foreknew.” This is what we have in Romans 8:29, “For whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” God foreknew, that is “fore-loved”, each and all of His chosen people before creation.

As we return to our passage of 2 Thessalonians 2:13ff, we read that...

C. Paul declared that He thanked God because God had chosen them to be saved.

Again, Paul wrote in **2 Thessalonians 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...*” Now here in the ESV we have a translation that differs from other English translations. A few of the more popular translations translate verse 13 this way:

^{NKJ} “But 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...”

^{NAS} “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you *from the beginning* for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”

^{NIV} “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.”

^{RSV} “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you *from the beginning* to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

Here, again, is the translation we have been using, the ESV:

^{ESV} “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.”

The issue at hand is that there is a variant in the ancient Greek Manuscripts in verse 13. Some old New Testament Greek manuscripts have the Greek words, ἀπ ἀρχῆς (*ap arkais*), which is translated, “from the beginning.” Other Greek manuscripts have the word, ἀπαρχὴν (*aparkene*). All of the translations that have the words, “from the beginning”, prefer the first variant. The ESV translators chose the second Greek word listed as the preferred variant, and so they translated it as “firstfruit.” I believe that the ESV translators were mistaken in doing this. It should read, “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you *from the beginning* to be saved.

The point that Paul made was that God had chosen these people to become Christians “from the beginning”, that is, even before creation. When God first established His decree of all that would come to pass within history, He chose, or elected, all those who would be saved from their sins. This same teaching is conveyed in other passages. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

“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, ⁴*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... (Eph. 1:3f)

The Book of Revelation describes those who are damned as having been “*not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world...*” (Rev. 17:8).

God chose all who would receive salvation, having made this choice of them before creation. He purposed that He would save them from their sin through Jesus Christ. Paul thanked God for this understanding of God’s purposes and ways.

Now, God having chosen His people unto salvation from the beginning, Paul wrote of *the manner* in which God applies His salvation to His people.

D. Paul declared that He thanked God because God had chosen them to be saved “*through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*”

How does God save His people, the ones that He had chosen in the beginning to be saved? He does so through two means: (1) “*through sanctification by the Spirit*” and (2) “*belief in the truth.*” Let us consider each of these.

1. “*Through the sanctification by the Spirit.*”

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Blessed Holy trinity. It is He, the Holy Spirit”, who applies to the elect the salvation that God has promised. This idea is expressed similarly in 1 Peter 1:1ff, which read, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *in sanctification of the Spirit*, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...” God the Father elects those who will be saved, Jesus Christ redeems them through His death on the cross, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies His elect, applying salvation to them.

Now when we speak of sanctification, we most often think of *progressive sanctification*, that work of God’s grace in the life of the Christian whereby He transforms our thinking and behavior so that we become more like Him, Jesus Christ. But here the sanctification of the Spirit is speaking in broader terms than our progressive sanctification as Christians. It carries the idea of the Holy Spirit coming to us when we were lost, in our sin, and setting us apart as ones to receive all of God’s work of salvation in our lives. There is a sense that before you were saved, even before you had come under conviction of sin, the Holy Spirit was “sanctifying you”, setting you apart from the fallen human race in order to receive His salvation. Had the Spirit not been working in your life, you would have never come to Christ in faith. And so, this work of “sanctification of the Spirit”, is that work of preparation and execution whereby the Holy Spirit brings one to faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote of this own conversion due to the grace of God. Galatians 1 reads:

¹⁴And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when it pleased God, *who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace*, ¹⁶to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood... (Gal. 1:14-16)

God had chosen from eternity that Paul would be converted to Christ for salvation. Because of this, even at his birth, God had “separated” him unto Himself, that is, God had distinguished him and set His heart upon him, even while Paul was still in his sins and under God’s wrath. God had ordered his life until the day that He had determined that He would call him to salvation through His grace. It was God the Holy Spirit who had superintended Paul’s entire life and effected this work of God’s grace in bringing him to experience conversion on that road to Damascus, as recorded in Acts 9. In the same way, if you are a Christian, even before you were a Christian, God the Holy Spirit superintended all the events in your life, preserving you physically, providentially governing your life even when you were under His wrath in your sin, until the day that God had decreed in eternity that He would save your soul. And then upon your conversion, He continued to sanctify you, that is, set you apart for Himself, working in you even as He has governed the events of your life, all to the end that you would receive and enjoy His everlasting salvation.

We then read of the second means by which our God saves us, not only through the sanctification of the Spirit, but...

2. “Through... belief in the truth.

God the Holy Spirit sanctifies His people prior to and unto the time and place they embrace through faith the truth of God that brings them salvation. Here the idea of “truth” should be seen as all that God would have us know and believe with respect to salvation. At the heart of this “truth” is the gospel. Paul had written of the “truth of the gospel” elsewhere. In Colossians we read:

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before *in the word of the truth of the gospel*, ⁶which

has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth... (Col. 1:3-6)²

God has determined that He will save His people through faith in the truth of the gospel, and through faith alone. Saving faith is a duty of all men everywhere. All people should believe what God has said. But saving faith is only possible for the elect. For although mankind has free will to choose their own destiny, that free will is governed by the sinful heart, until the Holy Spirit causes a new heart to be imparted to the sinner, enabling him and moving him to believe the truth of the gospel. And so, really, free will is a misnomer, even an errant idea if it is understood to be a claim that a sinful man has the ability in himself to choose to believe the truth of God apart from God's enabling grace. It takes the grace of God to save a sinner, for it is God's grace that enables the sinner to believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Scriptures make this doctrine very clear. Speaking of the ministry of Apollos in Corinth we read that "when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). The apostle argued for salvation by God's grace in Ephesians 2. We read,

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved ***through faith***, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph. 2:4-8)

It takes God's power operating in us to enable us to believe initially in the gospel. And then we are in need of His power to sustain us in faith unto our final salvation. The Apostle Peter wrote of this:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵***who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation*** ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. 1:3-5)

E. Paul continued to write of this salvation that God has brought to us by His grace through faith. In **verse 14** we read, "***To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.***"

1. To this (salvation) He called you through our gospel.

When we speak of God's calling as taught in the Scriptures, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of calling. There is what has been generally referred to as a *general call* and then there is God's *effectual call* to salvation.

a. The general call (or, universal or external call) of God to salvation

This general call of God given to all people everywhere to come to God for salvation. This call is made by the understanding of God derived from *nature* and in the *human conscience*. This general call of God also comes through the message of the *gospel* which we are to proclaim to everyone everywhere, inviting them to come to Christ to receive freely the salvation that is in Him. When we witness to others, or preach to others, we are extending this general call to them to turn from sins and believe on the Lord Jesus.

² Paul also referred to "the truth of the gospel" in Galatians 2:5 and 14.

The general call of God to salvation is frequently rejected entirely. The general call of God, if it is alone, will always be rejected by sinners. Something more needs to be done than simply make a plan of salvation known. Sinners will reject Christ unless and until something more than an external invitation of the gospel is performed. This rejection of the grace of God in His external call may be seen in Jerusalem's rejection of Christ. He proclaimed,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and *you would not!*” (Matt. 23:37)

The grace of God in the general call of the gospel alone is insufficient to bring people to salvation. People need more than just hearing the gospel. The Holy Spirit must apply the gospel to an individual's mind and heart before salvation can take place. And so, the general call of God, if alone, will be rejected by sinners. The general offer of the gospel is insufficient to bring salvation apart from an inward work of grace by God leading and enabling a sinner to receive and respond to the Gospel. The 18th century Baptist, **John Gill**, wrote, “It (the general call) is always insufficient and ineffectual of itself unto real conversion, without the powerful and efficacious grace of God.” What is needed is more than a general call, an effectual, or inward call of God must bring a sinner to receive Christ in the gospel. This is an act of special grace whereby God applies salvation to His people.

b. The effectual call of God to salvation

This is the call of the gospel that goes out to specific individuals. This is the call of God that is heard by them “who have ears to hear.” The Holy Spirit issues this effectual call to the elect through the general call of the gospel. This is the call described in the passage we read earlier, “*Moreover whom he predestinated, these He also called*” (Rom. 8:30).

This call of God is effectual, that is, it always accomplishes the purpose for which it was issued--the salvation of God's chosen ones. Paul described his own experience of this effectual call of God:

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and *called me by His grace*, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. (Gal 1:15).

Before we ever called on God to save us, He called on us to save us. This effectual call is *the inward call of the Holy Spirit* whereby He enables us to hear, understand, and respond to the Gospel. It is frequently referred to as an *effectual calling* because it *always* results in bringing the one called to faith in Jesus Christ. Here is a definition:

Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered us in the Gospel.

This is the call of the gospel that goes out to specific individuals who are the objects of His eternal love. This is the call of God that is heard by them “who have ears to hear.” The Holy Spirit issues this effectual call to the elect through the general call of the Gospel. This is what we have recorded before us in **2 Thessalonians 2:13f**:

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you [this is election] to salvation [this is predestination] through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice again that Paul felt “bound” to thank God for their salvation. Why? Because they had been converted to Christ through His grace alone. God had chosen them “from the beginning” -- they had been elected. When the time arrived for them to begin to receive salvation to which they were destined, He “sanctified” them that is set them apart from sin and the world. God had determined to save them through the work of the Holy Spirit in them so that they would believe the truth of the Gospel. This work of bringing His chosen ones to Christ is described here as God’s action. Paul wrote that God had “called” the Thessalonian Christians through the means of the gospel. This call of God unto salvation is effectual, always accomplishing the purpose for which it was issued--the salvation of God’s chosen ones.

We read of this calling of God unto salvation in numerous other places. **2 Timothy 1:9**, “(God) has saved us, and called us with *a holy calling*, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” We read of God’s calling that we read recently in a passage in Jeremiah. God said of His people Israel, which is also true of all His people, “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*” (Jer. 31:2f). God *drawing* His people to Himself is His calling. The writer to the Hebrews described it this way: “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly calling*, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus” (Heb. 3:1).

Next Paul set forth to the church at Thessalonica...

II. Rendering faithful obedience to God’s Word in response to our salvation by His grace (v. 15)

We read in **verse 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.*” The response that we Christians should have to the grace of God that has brought us salvation is to order our lives according to the Christian faith that has been delivered unto us. By “traditions taught by us”, Paul was referring to the apostolic doctrines that had been circulated among the Lord’s churches. At this time the New Testament canon of Scripture was not complete. But there was much oral tradition of regarding the apostles’ witness and words regarding the ministry of Jesus Christ. There were also available some of the epistles that the apostle Paul and others had penned. By way of extension and application, we are to order our lives according to the Holy Scriptures that Our God has delivered unto us. Here is a confirming word regarding this understanding:

Linked with this is the injunction to “hold the traditions.” The verb is used by Paul elsewhere only in Colossians 2:19 (of holding fast to Christ the “Head”). It is often used in the literal sense as of holding with the hand. It denotes a firm grip. It is used of holding the traditions of the elders in Mark 7:3, 8. “Traditions” is a word that points us to the fact that the Christian message is essentially derivative. It does not originate in man’s fertile imaginations. It rests on the facts of the life, death, and resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Paul disclaims originating these things, and expressly says that the things he passed on he had himself first received (1 Cr. 15:3). For us these traditions are embodied in the documents of the New Testament. But for Paul’s readers there was no such volume. Or them the Christian traditions were principally those which they had received by word of mouth. Paul also associates “epistle of ours” with the spoken word. By this he probably means 1 Thessalonians. He puts no difference between the authority of the written word and the spoken word. Both alike were in very deed the word of God, as we see from 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Corinthians 14:37.³

In the final two verses of our passage Paul set forth our responsibility to...

III. Pray to God that He would comfort and establish our hearts (vs. 16, 17)

³ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (William. B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 240.

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

Although Paul had written to them telling of perilous times before them, they were to experience comfort from God in knowing their eternal destiny. This confident hope should move them to order their lives in a manner that would please God. God the Father and Jesus Christ may impart this sense of well-being to the soul. For God loves his people and has designed their good and their glorious future.

There are some true Christians who needlessly trouble themselves respecting their souls. They are looking too carefully at their own souls even as they are failing to look more fully at what God has promised them in Jesus Christ. We are to pray that the Lord would bring comfort to their souls and that He would confirm them in their commitment to cleave unto Him in faith.

May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace! (Psa. 29:11)
