

“Stand Firm and Hold Fast”
2 Thessalonians 2:15-17
(Preached at Trinity, August 16, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verse 15** stands as a summary to what Paul has taught from the beginning of this chapter.
 - A. There is coming a great apostasy upon the church and many will fall away.
 - B. Before Christ returns Antichrist will be revealed who will wreak havoc upon the church. Multitudes will be deluded by his deceptions. They will stand condemned at the coming of Christ.
 - C. Paul says in **Verse 7** this lawlessness is already at work in the world, but it will greatly intensify as the end nears. Men will love lawlessness and hate that which is holy. They will be deluded to believe lies. Sound doctrine will be mocked and mere religion will be a substitute to loving and serving Christ.
2. In contrast to those who take pleasure in wickedness, God has chosen His beloved from the foundation of the world to salvation and belief of the truth. God will keep them and sustain them to the end, even in the face of the dangers that lie ahead.
3. **Verse 15** opens with what is called a inferential particle. It denotes a result or conclusion—a logical inference. It forms a transition from what came before. The NASB & ESV translate it “So then . . .” The KJV & CSBO translate it “therefore” We see this often in the New Testament.
 - A. After warning of the danger of false prophets and then describing the nature of good fruit and bad fruit Jesus uses this word – “So then . . .”
Matthew 7:20 NAU - "So then, you will know them by their fruits."
 - B. After the Rich Young Ruler went away and Jesus states how difficult it is for rich men to be saved – easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, the disciples conclude:
Matthew 19:25 NAU - "Then who can be saved?"
 - C. Likewise, seeing the dangers which lie ahead, and seeing the great privilege of your election and calling, what effect should it have upon how you live in this present day?
2 Thessalonians 2:15 NAU - "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught,"
4. Paul sets two priorities we must maintain as we navigate the rest of our lives. Knowing the great possibility of difficult days ahead we must stand firm and we must hold fast. Paul states both of these in the imperative and both in the present tense, which translated would be “Stand firm” and “Hold fast” and keep on standing firm and holding fast.

- I. First, Paul commands us to “Stand Firm”
- A. This refers to remaining steadfast in the faith – standing firm upon our profession
1. Paul is saying that this is the fruit of faith
Faith and steadfastness are inseparable
2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 NAU - "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. ¹⁴ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us."
 2. The Gospel demands looking to Christ as our Solid Rock, our Sure Foundation, Our Corner Stone – We must stand firm upon this unmovable bedrock of our soul.
 3. Jesus Christ is worthy of our faith. He is worthy of following. Paul’s words here are a charge to perseverance.
στήκω – Stand firm – the idea of remaining steadfast. The picture of stability.
Philippians 1:27 NAU - "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"
 4. Eternal life is promised to those who endure to the end.
Matthew 10:22 NAU - "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."
- B. Standing firm means we are pressing on through every adversity
1. This demands a steadfast determination. We have resolved, I will follow Christ to the end, come what may, no matter the cost.
Paul charges the Corinthians to be courageous, to stand firm in the faith, to act like men.
1 Corinthians 16:13 NAU - "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."
 2. Matthew Henry writes: “Observe, He does not say, “You are chosen to salvation, and therefore you may be careless and secure;” but *therefore stand fast*. God’s grace in our election and vocation is so far from superseding our diligent care and endeavour that it should quicken and engage us to the greatest resolution and diligence.”¹

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2348.

3. It is a call to press on in holiness.
 This is the continuing admonition of the New Testament.
 Those who have the hope of eternity press on in holiness.
1 John 3:2-3 NAU - "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.
³ And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."
2 Peter 3:13-14 NAU - "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,"
1 Corinthians 15:58 NAU - "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord."

- C. Standing firm implies turbulence, tossing waves, fierce battles through which there is no retreat. The Christian must remain firmly fixed in Christ.
1. The life of a believer is a great battle, an unceasing warfare
 - a. The imagery of warfare is used over and over in the NT.
 - b. As soldiers of Christ we must remain faithful to our calling
2 Timothy 2:4 NAU - "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."
 2. Standing firm is at the heart of fighting any battle.
 The image is of a soldier standing his ground. We must not retreat or flee in fear. We must not surrender and give ourselves over to the control of the enemy. We must not lay down our weapons or slumber in the midst of the battle. Perseverance is the order of the day—Stand firm!
 3. The winds of compromise are always blowing. We are continually being tempted to act like the citizens of this world. Paul reminds his readers,
Philippians 3:20 NAU - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"
Philippians 4:1 NAU – Therefore "stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."
 4. The pleasures and riches of this life can appear irresistible. It has caused the faith of some to suffer shipwreck upon the rocks of worldly pleasures.
1 Timothy 6:10 NAU - "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
- D. We are charged to stand firm and yet we understand our weakness.
1. Those who stand firm are those who are held mightily. After Paul prayed three times regarding his thorn in the flesh he received a word from God:
2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NAU - "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

2. Martin Luther stood firmly in the face of an unbelievable battle, yet the battle was not his own.
*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
 Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
 Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
 Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
 And He must win the battle.*
3. We stand because we are united inseparably to Christ
 Like a stately oak we remain immovable through every storm because we have been firmly planted.
Psalm 1:1-3 NAU - "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers."
4. John Eadie, Scottish theologian from the 19th century wrote:
 "To stand, or stand fast, in the Lord, is neither to wander out of Him, nor even to waver in connection with Him, but to remain immovable in fellowship with Him, —to live, in Him without pause—to walk in Him without digression—to love Him without rival—and to serve Him without compromise."²

II. Then, Paul admonishes them to “hold to the traditions which you were taught

A. What does Paul mean here?

1. He uses a strong word - κρατέω – It refers to a posture of strength, of laying hold or seizing, of taking custody or arresting—here it means to “hold fast.” It is a determination to grasp tightly and not let go.
 It is the word Jesus used to describe the slave seizing the one who owed him.
Matthew 18:28 NAU - "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'
 Or the arrest of Jesus:
Matthew 26:48 NAU - "Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."
2. Paul charges the Thessalonians to lay hold upon the traditions and not let go
3. But what are the traditions to which Paul was referring? The word refers to that which is handed down.
 - a. The Pharisees were guilty of holding to their traditions and forsaking the Word of God.
Matthew 15:6 NAU - "And *by this* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition."

² Eadie, John, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, reprint 2005), Page 235.

- b. The traditions handed down by the Apostles were of a different sort. Paul is speaking of the system of doctrinal truth that was being delivered by God to His church.
 - c. The teachings of the Apostles became the foundation upon which the church was built. These doctrines were the substance of the Word of God. We read of the early church:
Acts 2:42 NAU - "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." KJV: "Apostles' doctrine"
4. There was an expectation that the church would hold fast to these teachings
1 Corinthians 11:2 NAU - "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you."
Romans 6:17 NAU - "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,"
Philippians 4:9 NAU - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."
2 Timothy 1:13-14 NAU - "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*."
Paul's charge to Timothy:
1 Timothy 4:11 KJV - "These things command and teach."
- B. We must hold fast to the Word of God
1. Paul often warned of the danger of abandoning the doctrinal teachings of orthodoxy. Many a young person has left home only to abandon sound doctrine. In our age of the internet doctrinal winds blow from every direction.
2 Timothy 4:3-4 NAU - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."
 2. Standing fast in the faith demands standing firm upon the truths of the Christian faith
 3. We must hold firm to the Word of God, unwavering and uncompromising. We do not hold to human opinion, wisdom, or philosophy. We are not swayed by the ever-changing dictates of our modern culture. We stand unmoved upon God's unchanging Word.

Conclusion:

1. Standing firm in the raging battle that is all around us is an act of futility if we attempt it by our own might. Human weapons are completely impotent against our spiritual battles. And human strength is impotent in this spiritual war.
2. Paul wrote:
Ephesians 6:10-11 NAU - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."
3. We are in the midst of a raging war against unseen spiritual forces. We must remain steadfast and unmovable. This is only possible as we remain fixed upon Christ. It is a life of faith. Of absolute trust in Christ.
Through Christ we can live above this world and stand firm against whatever crushing force may rise against us.
Matthew 7:24-25 NAU - "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."