



## Stand Fast in Your Faith 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:18

### Introduction

In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul gave thanks for the Thessalonians' extraordinary faith, love, and hope, noting, *For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.* In his second letter, Paul thanks God for enabling the Thessalonians to abound and grow in their faith and love in spite of persecutions.

However, in Paul's absence, the Thessalonians were exposed to false teaching and this resulted in fear and confusion about the day of the Lord. Their minds were filled with questions. Had that day already come? Had they somehow missed it? These are the concerns Paul addresses in his second letter. His pastoral love for the Thessalonians is evident in his praises as he patiently repeats and confirms what he had taught them about the day of the Lord.

Sensing their bewilderment, Paul writes to reassure his beloved Thessalonians of God's love for them. He reviews all that God has done in saving them and giving them a share in His glory. He gently reminds them that in light of God's plan, purpose, and power carried out in them, they need to *stand fast* (12:15) in the truth and in their faith. They are not to be troubled and shaken loose from their moorings. Paul exhorts them to remain patient and to persevere in living out the truth in their daily lives.

Paul's love and concern for the Thessalonians shines forth in these final passages of his letter. He expresses his gratitude to God for all He has done for them. He prays passionately for their comfort and strength as they stand fast in serving the Lord. Yet he is unrelenting in commanding obedience to his teachings. Paul maintains that Christianity is not simply a set of principles, it is a way of life. He stresses that believers are to act upon what they believe and be examples of what they believe. Paul had set a Christian example for the Thessalonians, and they are to follow that example.

Is Christianity more to you than simply doctrine to believe? Is your life a witness to what you believe? Are you a living example of faith for others to see? This is what Paul encourages in closing his letter.

### Outline of 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

- I. Call to *Stand Fast* - 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
- II. Command Concerning Busybodies -  
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
- III. Closing Benediction - 2 Thessalonians  
3:14-18

### I. Call to Stand Fast - 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

In the midst of their trials and confusion, Paul encourages the Thessalonians by reminding them of God's love, sovereign plan, and power. He then prays for them.

#### A. God's Plan - 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

Paul gives thanks that God is working in the lives of the Thessalonians. God has chosen them, He has called them, and He will bring them to glory. He started the process of salvation and, by His Holy Spirit, will see that process through to completion.

##### 1. God.....chose you for salvation - 2:13

Paul writes that those who believe were chosen for salvation. Jesus told His disciples, *You did not choose me, but I chose you* (John 15:16). John Stott explains, "For we remember, before God laid hold of us, how willful and wayward and weak we were. There is, therefore, no option but to trace our salvation back beyond our 'decision' or 'commitment' (i.e. conversion) to the gracious initiative of God, and say 'God chose us.... God called us...'" (*The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, John R.W. Stott).

The New King James Version reads that God's choosing was, *From the beginning*. This is similar to what Paul later wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world* (1:4). However, the Greek words for "beginning" and "firstfruits" are very similar and some early manuscripts read, *as firstfruits*, instead of, *from the beginning*. If the translation is "firstfruits", the meaning derives from the Old Testament concept of taking a part of the whole harvest and dedicating it to God. So Paul is either saying the Thessalonians were chosen from eternity past, as in Ephesians 1:4 (*from the beginning*) or God has chosen them to be set apart for His work and His glory (*as firstfruits*). Both are equally true.

Paul also explains that salvation is accomplished *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*. Sanctification, or being set apart to be holy unto God, comes by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth who works in unconverted hearts to convict people of sin and guide them into all truth (John 16:7-15). He is the Helper, sent by God (John 14:15) as a demonstration of His love for us. The Holy Spirit is given to those who believe and repent (Acts 2:38), to dwell in us and with us (1 Corinthians 6:19), to make

us holy. He also seals us to secure and preserve our eternal salvation (Ephesians 1:13).

### 2. God called you....for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ - 2:14

In addition to being chosen by God, believers are *called* to salvation for the purpose of sharing in the glory of Christ. Paul wrote about this glory earlier in his letter. When the Lord returns, the power of His glory will be displayed through all those who belong to Him, for the purpose of praise and commendation (1:9-10).

Paul further explains that the "call" comes *by our gospel*. The instrument of God's call to the Thessalonians was Paul's preaching the gospel to them. Some years later, in his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote of the gospel as *the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* (Romans 1:16). The call to salvation and obtaining the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ comes through the gospel message. It can come through the reading of God's word or from the lips of a preacher (anyone who proclaims the gospel message).

"We need now to step back and survey this noble landscape. 'God chose you from the beginning for salvation....God called you through the gospel for glory.' There is nothing narrow-minded about the apostle Paul! His horizons are bounded by nothing less than the eternities of the past and of the future. In a single sentence the apostle's mind sweeps from 'the beginning' to 'the glory'" (The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, John R. W. Stott).

### 3. Stand Fast - 2:15

In light of everything God has done, there is no reason for minds to be troubled, faith to be shaken, or moorings to be loosed (2:2). Paul calls the Thessalonians (and us as well) to *stand fast*. We are to stand our ground and persevere in the midst of trials and tribulations. Other New Testament writers agree. We are to be like Job who persevered to see *the end intended by the Lord* (James 5:11). We are to endure, *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps* (1 Peter 2:21). The apostle Peter adds that we are also to rejoice: *Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy* (1 Peter 4:1).

Not only are believers to *stand fast*, Paul also calls the Thessalonian believers to *hold* (*hold to* - ESV, *hold fast* - NIV, *keep a strong grip on* - NLT) *the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or epistle*. Today we often think of "traditions" as customs or rituals, passed down through a culture or a family. But this is not the meaning of the word Paul uses. The Greek

word translated "traditions" is literally "teachings". It refers to truth that has been received and handed down. Paul is referring to what he has taught, both *by word* when he was with the Thessalonians and in the epistles (letters) he has written. For believers today, these teachings would be confined to the truths found in the Holy Bible. In the first century, there was no New Testament. Jewish believers were familiar with their Scriptures (parts of our present Old Testament) and they could search the Scriptures, as did the Bereans of Acts 17:10-12, to confirm the validity of what was prophesied about Christ. Beyond that, the oral teachings of Jesus and His apostles, along with certain letters written by the apostles, were held to be the truths of the faith. Today we have all that is necessary contained in both the Old and New Testaments. Hold on to that. Hold fast to it. Keep a strong grip on the truth so you will not be *carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men* (Ephesians 4:14).

### B. Paul's Prayer - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

Paul moves from words of assurance to prayer for the Thessalonians.

#### 1. Prayer for comfort and strength - 2:16-17

Paul has given words of *everlasting consolation and good hope* to the Thessalonians, of all that is theirs by God's grace. He asks that both *Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father*, will comfort their hearts and *establish them in every good word and work*.

As Christians *stand fast* (2:15) in the truth, they are to speak words and do works that are good and honor the Lord Jesus Christ. How do your words and works honor Him?

#### 2. Prayer request for us (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy) - 3:1-2

After offering an encouraging prayer for the Thessalonians, Paul asks that they pray for him in return. Mutual prayer is a blessing for all involved. Those who belong to a local body of believers, a church, need to pray for one another. Pastors and members of the local congregation should be lifted up in prayer. But we also need to pray for believers throughout the world. The body of Christ, the universal church, is held together by prayer. Thanks to modern technology, we can know what is happening in almost any part of the world. We can keep in contact with those on the other side of the globe to share prayer requests and answers to prayer. There are more opportunities than ever before to pray for others, whether across town or in distant parts of the world. How are you taking advantage of those opportunities?

- a. Prayer for success of the gospel ministry  
- verse 1

Paul asks that the efforts of his missionary team might have success, just as they had in Thessalonica. He prays that the gospel message may, *Run swiftly and be glorified*. Paul often used athletic allusions in his letters. Here he pictures the gospel as a fleet-footed runner in a race, headed toward the finish line where it will be crowned with glory. This is what had happened in Pisidian Antioch and in Thessalonica. The gospel ran into those cities, was honored by the reception it received, and accomplished God's purpose, *And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48).

- b. Prayer for deliverance from wicked men  
- verse 2

Paul and the Thessalonians knew firsthand about enemies of the gospel and the trouble they could cause. In fact, *unreasonable and wicked men* had forced Paul to flee from Thessalonica (Acts:17:5-8). Even as he wrote, the Thessalonians continued to experience persecutions. Paul describes the troublemakers as those who lack faith.

### 3. Power and faithfulness of God - 3:3-4

Paul was confident that God would be faithful to answer prayer. First of all, God is faithful. He is faithful to His promises and will perform what He has promised. He is also faithful to work out His perfect will in the spread of the gospel and the sanctification of those who are His by faith. Paul knew that it was by God's power his prayers for the Thessalonians would be answered. Through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, they would do all that he commanded.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit is at work within you. He has set you apart to be holy to God and He is working out that holiness in your life by giving you the power to obey God's word and live for Him. Is your life a witness to the power of God or are you quenching the Spirit by living a selfish and careless life? Remembering God's faithfulness, will you take care to be true and faithful in all you say and do?

### 4. Prayer for love and patience - 3:5

Faithfulness on our part requires love and patience. Paul prays, *Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ*. The writer of the Book of Hebrews reminds us of the patience of Christ, describing Him as *the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.....and consider Him who*

*endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. For you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin* (Hebrews 12:2-4).

## II. Command Concerning Busybodies - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

After praying for the Thessalonians, Paul gives warnings and commands concerning disorderly conduct. Matthew Henry notes, "The best society of Christians may have some faulty persons among them. Perfection is not to be found this side of heaven: but evil manners beget good laws" ([The Matthew Henry Commentary](#)). Paul gives good laws to address the evil manners of some in the church at Thessalonica.

### A. The Problem - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 and 11

Some of the members of the congregation were living *in a disorderly manner* and not following Paul's teachings. Instead of working and living quiet lives, they were *busybodies*. Paul had alluded to this problem in his first letter where he had written, *Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you* (1 Thessalonians 4:11). But some in the church had not heeded his warning.

Paul does not tell us why some of the Thessalonians were behaving this way, but scholars surmise that it had to do with false teaching about the day of the Lord. Thinking that the day of the Lord was on the horizon and the return of Christ was imminent, they decided to quit working and spend their time waiting. This caused a threefold problem:

1. it placed a burden on the faithful members of the congregation who felt obligated to support them,
2. it was a negative witness to the unbelieving community,
3. instead of being busy earning a living, the idle ones had become *busybodies*.

As many commentators have noted, those who are not busy with their own work usually end up meddling in other people's business.

### B. Paul's Example - 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (*we*) set the example while living and ministering in Thessalonica. They worked hard (*with labor and toil*) at their trade. Paul was a tent-maker and never hesitated to work in addition to preaching the gospel (Acts 18:3). He and his missionary team paid for the food they ate and were careful not to be a burden to anyone. They did it because it was the right thing to do and not because they lacked authority. Those who preach the gospel have the right to receive their living by the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14). When



Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, He taught them, *Remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of His wages* (Luke 10:7). Paul waived his right because he did not want to be a burden. He wanted to set an example.

### C. Paul's Commands - 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 10-14

In verse 6, Paul commands faithful *brethren* to withdraw from those who are being disobedient and disorderly. There are three reasons for this.

1. If the faithful continue to associate with offenders, outsiders will see it as approval of their disorderly way of life and it will reflect negatively on the church.
2. Keeping company with disorderly persons may encourage others to become like them. It is possible that the disorderly behavior might rub off on the faithful.
3. If the faithful separate themselves from the busybodies it will cause the offenders to be ashamed of their actions and change. The motive for refusing to keep company with the offenders was not punishment but brotherly love.

In verse 12, Paul directs his command to the disorderly busybodies, urging them *through the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quietness and eat their own bread*. He reminds them of the command he had given while with them, *If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat* (verse 10). This is a Biblical principle which was set forth in the Book of Genesis, *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread* (Genesis 3:19, NASB). The truth conveyed is that every able-bodied person is to work and earn his own living, not relying upon others to support him. Eventually people get tired of helping those who refuse to help themselves. This may have been the case in Thessalonica, for Paul gives encouragement to the hard working brethren, *do not grow weary in doing good* (verse 13).

### III. Closing Benediction - 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

Paul closes his letter with his signature, a mark that the letter was genuinely from him. Usually a scribe wrote as Paul dictated his letters, but Paul always wrote the closing, along with his signature.

His closing benediction invokes

God to bless the Thessalonians with His peace, His presence, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we obtain peace with God and are able to enter into His presence.

### Closing Applications

The apostle Paul was one of the first missionaries. He carried the message of God's gracious work through His Son Jesus Christ to cities throughout the Roman Empire. His good news was that God had sent His only begotten Son into the world, in fulfillment of prophecy, to die for our sin. God had raised Him from the dead and all things had been made new.

Paul laid down his own life and took up the cross of Christ (Luke 9:23) to spread the gospel message. His encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ had changed his life. (See Acts Chapter 9 for how this change occurred.) As a new man in Christ, Paul not only preached the gospel, but lived it as well. Every place he went, he was a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in weak flesh.

Paul had taken the good news to Thessalonica. It had been received with joy, and the new believers became living examples to others (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). Their reception of the gospel was life-changing. They turned from worshiping idols and the emperor to serve their new King, the Lord Jesus Christ. They were no longer merely citizens of Rome. They had become citizens of the kingdom of God. Their loyalty was now to the Lord and they steadfastly and patiently awaited His return. The gospel had radically changed their lives.

Have you embraced the gospel message with joy? How has your life changed as a result? Like Paul and the Thessalonians, you are now a citizen of the kingdom of God. Is this evident in your life? Are you standing fast in the truth of the gospel or have you been drifting into the world and the unholy loyalties it tries to thrust upon you? What changes do you need to make in order to live as a citizen of God's kingdom?

In what ways are you experiencing the peace of God in your life? How have you become more aware of this peace through the study of Thessalonians? How will you reach out to share this peace with others?





