

THE SALVATION OF GOD'S FOLLOWERS

2 THESSALONIANS 02: 13–17

Introduction

This passage is a contrast between the followers of the antichrist and the followers of Christ. It is a passage that should speak with force to the heart of the believer.

- I. Believers are saved, not condemned (v. 12) like the followers of antichrist (v. 13).
- II. The origin of salvation: God has chosen believers (v. 13).
- III. The purpose of salvation (v. 14).
- IV. The duty of salvation: To stand firm and to cling to the Word (v. 15).
- V. The resources for salvation (vv. 16-17).

I. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Salvation of Believers

Believers are not condemned like the followers of the antichrist; they are saved. Note the word “but.” It is a sharp contrast between the followers of the antichrist and the followers of the Lord. The followers of the antichrist are to be condemned, that is, judged and punished. But the followers of the Lord are *the brothers loved by the Lord*. Why? Because they follow Him. They believe Him, all that He claimed: that He is truly the Son of God who has come to earth...

- to die for men.
- to save men from death and judgment.
- to give men eternal life.
- to bring assurance, love, joy and peace to men as they walk throughout life.

Therefore, believers love the Lord with all their hearts, and they follow Him ever so diligently, doing all they can to please Him. The Lord is bound to count a person who so loves and follows Him as one of His *loved followers*. The Lord is bound to *save* any person who truly believes Him.

The point is this: believers are not to be condemned like the followers of antichrist, but saved. The great truth of salvation is the discussion of this passage.

II. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Origin of Salvation: God

The origin of salvation is God. “From the beginning God chose you to be saved.” This is a most wonderful truth. God has *chosen* believers before the world was ever created, chosen them to salvation. God wants us to be with Him. God does not want us to be judged and condemned and separated from Him. God wants us to live with Him forever and ever.

Note: the Greek word for “chose” (heilato) is strong. It is an unusual word to use here. Leon Morris points out that this is the only time it is used in the New Testament (*The*

Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians. “Tyndale New Testament Commentaries,” p. 136). The word’s uniqueness is this: it is one of the words that is used when God chose Israel (in the Greek Old Testament):

Deu 26:18 *And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands.*

Deu 7:6-7 *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.*

Deu 10:15 *Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.*

The point is this: God has chosen believers in the very same sense in which He chose Israel. Believers are as chosen by God as Israel was. God loves us from the depths of His heart, and He wants us to be secure in the fact that He has *chosen us*. Our salvation is secure because it is based upon His having chosen us.

1. God has chosen believers to be saved “*from the beginning*,” that is, before the foundation of the world. This is a most glorious truth: God saw us *as saved* before we were ever born. He chose us to be saved before He ever created the world. Just think of the security in this. If God saw us *as saved* before the earth was made — if God saw us *saved* before we were ever born, then there is no way we can be lost and removed from His love and care. This is what Jesus meant when He said:

John 10:28-29 *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”*

What security! Having been chosen by God to salvation — chosen from the beginning, from eternity past — before the earth was ever established. There is no judgment or condemnation for the believer; the believer will not be judged and condemned with the followers of the antichrist nor with any other unbelievers.

Eph 1:4 *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love.*

Note a most crucial point: in the Bible the truth of God’s choice (election and predestination) is not so much a statement of theology or philosophy — it is more a message that speaks to the spiritual experience of the believer. If the pure logic of philosophy and theology is applied, then God’s choice says that God chooses some for heaven and others for a terrible hell. But this is simply not what God means in the passages dealing with *His choice*, and this fact needs to be given close attention by all

ministers. What God wants believers to do is to take heart, for He has assured their salvation and given them the greatest security imaginable. This is what He means by His having *chosen* us to be saved. (See notes, Jn. 6:44-46; Rom. 8:29.) The next two points show how salvation takes place, both God's part and man's part.

2. God has chosen believers "*through the sanctifying work of the Spirit*. The word "sanctifying" means to set apart or be separated unto God. We must always remember this fact (too many forget it and thereby become inconsistent in their theology and teaching of the Word). A man is a dead spirit; therefore, he can do nothing spiritually just as a dead body can do nothing physically. The natural man prefers self and sin; therefore, if a man with a dead spirit is to come to Christ, he has to be acted upon and drawn by God. Both God's Spirit and man have a part in salvation. The part of God's Spirit is to move upon the heart of a man and stir him to set apart his life unto God. How does the Spirit of God do this?
 - a. The Holy Spirit quickens or makes alive the gospel to a man's mind so that he *sees it as never before*. He sees, understands, grasps as never before that "the Father...has sent" Christ to feed and nourish man (to save and to give him life). In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3

John 5:21 "*For just as the Father raises the dead [spiritually dead] and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.*"

John 6:63 "*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*"

Rom 8:11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

Eph 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

Eph 2:4-5 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.*

Eph 4:22-23 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds.*

Col 3:10 *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Ezek 37:10 *So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet — a vast army.*

- b. The Holy Spirit convicts a man of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, that is, of his need to be fed and nourished (saved and given life).

John 16:8 “When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”

- c. The Holy Spirit attracts men to the cross of Christ through its glorious provisions.

John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 12:32-33 “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

1 Cor 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Gal 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Eph 2:16 And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Col 1:20 And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

- d. The Holy Spirit stirs a man to respond by coming to Christ.

Mat 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

John 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”

Isa 30:21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

Rev 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Isa 55:1-3 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

3. God has chosen believers through “belief in the truth,” that is, through believing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- => The Lord Jesus Christ has died for believers: taken their sins upon Himself and suffered the penalty, judgment, condemnation and punishment of their sins. He has sacrificed and substituted His life for them.
- => The Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead for believers: conquered death and ascended into heaven for them.

The believers of the world believe the gospel with all their hearts: believe they will never have to die because Jesus Christ died for them — believe they shall ascend into heaven to live eternally with the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. They believe and have entrusted their lives to this glorious truth.

The point is this: when a person really believes the truth of the gospel, God saves him. This is man's part in salvation. No person has ever been saved who did not believe the truth of the gospel. And no person who has rejected the gospel is lost because God has not chosen him. The person is lost because he rejected Christ. God will choose any person who will accept Christ. This is His Word; it is the promise of His Word. God will not force us to believe nor will He keep us from believing. The choice is every person's choice. No person is forced to receive or to reject Christ. Every person is responsible for his own decision.

John 3:16-18 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*

John 5:24 *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

John 6:28-29 *Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

John 11:25 *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”*

John 12:46 *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

John 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Rom 10:9-10 *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

III. 2 Thessalonians 2:14 Purpose of Salvation: Glory

The purpose of salvation is to gain the glory of Christ. Remember: the Thessalonian believers were suffering severe persecution. Think what this verse meant to them. They were bound for glory — to obtain and share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The word "glory" (*doxes*) means to possess perfect light and to be full of perfect light; to dwell in the perfect light, brilliance, splendour, brightness, lustre and magnificence of God. (See *Glory*, Jn. 17:22.)

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ as an *heir of God*.

Rom 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

=> The believer will be glorified by being given a body just like the body of Christ.

Phil 3:21 *Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ by appearing in the glory of heaven.

Col 3:4 *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ by receiving a nature of glory, a glorious nature just like the nature of Christ.

Rom 8:18 *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ by receiving an eternal glory.

2 Cor 4:17 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ by receiving a salvation that involves eternal glory.

2 Tim 2:10 *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ by sharing in the glory to be revealed.

1 Pet 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

=> The believer will be glorified with Christ by receiving the light of the glory of God, and they will reign with Him for ever and ever.

Rev 22:5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

IV. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Salvation: Stand Firm in Faith

The duty of salvation is to stand firm and to cling to the Word of God. Note the word "teachings" (paradoseis). It means all the Word of God whether it is taught or written. Leon Morris quotes J.B. Lightfoot: "The prominent idea of *paradosis* [tradition] or teachings... is that of an authority external to the teacher himself." Leon Morris himself says:

"This is another way of putting the truth...that the gospel is not of human origin, and the preacher is not at liberty to substitute his own thoughts for that which he has received" (The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians. "Tyndale New Testament Commentaries," p. 138).

We are to stand firm and cling to the Word of God. We are not to buckle under to the world and its enticements. We are not to cave in, as the followers of the antichrist will do. We are to stand firm and cling to the Word of God no matter the inducement and the opposition.

John 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Phil 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

1 Pet 5:8-9 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

2 Pet 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

Josh 23:8 But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

V. *2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 Resources of Salvation*

The resources of salvation are fivefold.

- 1 The person who is saved receives the love of God and of Christ (see *Love*, 1 Th. 3:12).
2. The person who is saved receives eternal encouragement (paraklesin aionian). The phrase means eternal encouragement, comfort and strength. It is a consolation and strength that cannot be shaken by anything — no matter what it is — either now or in eternity.
3. The person who is saved receives good hope. What greater hope could the believer have than to live in glory with the Lord God forever and ever (see *Glory*, 2 Th. 2:14)?
Note: our hope is given us through the grace of God and through His grace alone.

John 14:2-3 “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

1 Th 4:16-18 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

4. The person who is saved receives comfort or “encouragement” (parakalesai). The word means exhortation, encouragement, admonition, comfort. Note that God and Christ are the Ones who can comfort, exhort and encourage the believer to live like they should. When the believer comes to Christ for strength, Christ will comfort and encourage him.
5. The person who is saved is strengthened in every good word and work. The word “strengthen” (sterixai) means to establish, secure, make stable, set fast and make firm. The one thing men long for is to be secure, strong and firmly established in life. God is able to fulfil this longing. God is able to establish and strengthen man and to give him a strong life. ■