LESSON 11

Love That Endures

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word

— 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

We hold our footing in unsettling times by standing on what God has already done for us and holding to what we were taught, while the Lord who loved us first keeps strengthening us.

Introduction

THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA WAS YOUNG WHEN THE TROUBLE STARTED. Paul preached there for only a few weeks before the city turned on him and the brothers sent him away by night (Acts 17:1-10). The believers he left behind suffered at the hands of their own countrymen (1 Thessalonians 2:14). Paul worried enough to send Timothy back *to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions* (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3). Now a fresh shaking had come. Someone was telling them the day of the Lord had already arrived.

Last week's lesson asked you to read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 and watch how much of the paragraph describes what God has already done before Paul says *stand firm*. The count is lopsided. In verses 13-14 God loves, chooses, sets apart by His Spirit, and calls. In verse 16 He loves and gives. Verse 15 holds the only commands in the paragraph, and there are two of them. Then verse 17 asks God for more.

That's how love endures. You stand on what God has done, and you keep asking Him for what you still need.

We'll follow Paul through the rumor that shook the church (2:1-12), what God had already done for it (2:13-14), the two commands (2:15), and the prayer that carries them (2:16-17). Then we'll go to the upper room, where the Lord prayed for this church before Paul ever did.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 – Shaken by a Rumor

Paul asks them *not to be easily upset or troubled* by any prophecy, message, or letter *alleging that the day of the Lord has come* (2:2). *Upset* is the word for something shaken loose, the word Luke uses for the foundations of the Philippian jail in the earthquake. *Troubled* is rarer. Outside this verse the New Testament uses it only when Jesus told His disciples on the Mount of Olives not to be alarmed by wars and rumors of wars.[63] Jesus had already warned against this kind of panic.

The third source Paul names for the rumor is *a letter supposedly from us*. Someone may have been putting words in the apostle's mouth. That's why he signs the end of this letter in his own hand (3:17), and it's why verse 15 will tell the church to hold to what it actually received.

Verses 3-12 describe a rebellion and a man of lawlessness who must come before that day. Readers have puzzled over these verses for centuries, and Paul's own aside explains part of the reason: *Don't you*

remember that when I was still with you I used to tell you about this? (2:5). The Thessalonians had heard the spoken teaching that fills in what the letter leaves out. Later readers have only the letter.[64] The details are hard, but Paul's main point is plain: the day hadn't come, and when the lawless one does appear, the Lord Jesus will bring him to nothing at His coming (2:8).

Verse 10 has a phrase that belongs in any study of love. The deceived perish *because they did not accept the love of the truth* (2:10). Paul calls it a failure of love. They were offered the truth and wouldn't love it. You're easy to shake when you love something else more than the truth, whether it's alarm, novelty, or the latest prediction.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 – Loved, Chosen, Called

But we ought to thank God always for you. Verses 10-12 describe people who refused the love of the truth. Verse 13 turns to people who are loved.

Paul has thanked God for them once already, because *the love each one of you has for one another is increasing* (1:3). Now he thanks God again, and this time he talks about God's love for them. *Brothers and sisters loved by the Lord.* The participle is the one Paul used for the Colossians, *dearly loved* (Colossians 3:12), and its tense describes a love set on them in the past that still holds.[65] The Thessalonians were frightened and confused. Before he gives a single instruction, Paul tells them where they stand with God.

Then he lists what God has done. *From the beginning God has chosen you for salvation.* Some manuscripts read *as a firstfruit,* and either reading puts the initiative with God.[66] Paul also says how the choosing reached them: *through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.* The Spirit set them apart, and they believed. The people of verse 10 refused the truth. These people received it.

He called you to this through our gospel. God's choosing reached Thessalonica in an ordinary way: Paul reasoning in a synagogue over three Sabbaths (Acts 17:2). The people who heard that gospel and believed it were the people God had called.

So that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's where God's call leads, and He set the destination before the trouble ever started. When you know where you're going, you can bear a lot of hardship on the way. The day of the Lord hadn't come yet. When it does, these people will share the glory of the One who is coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 – Stand Firm and Hold On

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by what we said or what we wrote.

So then ties the commands to everything above them. God has loved them, chosen them, and called them. Because of that, they stand.

Stand firm is a word for holding a position under pressure. *Hold to* describes a strong grip, the word for seizing something and not letting go.[67] A shaken church needs both.

What they hold is *the traditions*. The word means what has been handed over, and here it's the apostolic teaching Paul delivered in person and by letter. A rumor had arrived claiming to come from Paul. Paul's answer to a counterfeit is to grip the original more tightly. That's also how a church accepts *the love of the truth* that the deceived refused in verse 10: it holds on to it.

Both commands are plural. In this letter nobody stands firm alone. The command goes to brothers and sisters, and you keep it together, each of you helping steady the others.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 – The Prayer Behind the Command

Paul gives two commands and immediately prays for the strength to keep them. He names two Persons, the Son first and then the Father, and follows them with singular verbs, *encourage* and *strengthen*, as though the Father and the Son act as one.[68]

Who has loved us. This is the third time love shows up in the chapter. Some refuse the love of the truth (2:10). The church is loved by the Lord (2:13). And God *has loved us* (2:16), in a tense that looks back to a finished act.[69] Paul doesn't stop to say when. The Thessalonians had heard him prove from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead (Acts 17:3).

That love has already given two gifts. *Eternal encouragement* is comfort that doesn't run out when the next rumor arrives. *Good hope* looks ahead to the glory of verse 14. Both come *by grace*.

Notice what Paul asks for. God has already *given us eternal encouragement*, and Paul asks Him to *encourage your hearts*. *Strengthen* is the word Jesus used with Peter, *strengthen your brothers* (Luke 22:32), and together the two described Timothy's errand in the first letter.[70] Paul had sent a man to strengthen and encourage this church. Now he asks God to do it.

In every good work and word. The strength God gives shows up in the ordinary good you do and say while you wait for the Lord.

A few verses later Paul prays once more: *May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance* (3:5).[71] God's love is the love this chapter has traced since verse 13. Christ's endurance takes us to the night before the cross.

Looking to Christ

On the night before the cross, John writes, *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* (John 13:1). That's love that endures. Before the night was over, He put it into a prayer.

John 17 is that prayer. He prayed for the men in the room, and then for more: *I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word* (17:20). The Thessalonians believed through the apostles' word, and every congregation has since. This church was prayed for before it existed, and so were you.

Holy Father, protect them by your name (17:11). *I am not praying that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one* (17:15). Paul promises the same thing in nearly the same words: *But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one* (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Jesus had kept His own while He was with them: *I guarded them and not one of them is lost* (17:12). Paul's word *guard* is the same word Jesus used.[72]

Then He prayed about where His people are going. *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory* (17:24). That's the destination of 2 Thessalonians 2:14, *the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The glory Paul promised a shaken church is the glory Jesus asked for on the night before He died.

He also prayed that the world would come to know the Father had *loved them* as He loved the Son (17:23). The Thessalonians were *loved by the Lord* with that same love.

Then He went out to the garden where the soldiers would come, and He endured the cross for the people He had just prayed for. When Paul directs the church's hearts to *Christ's endurance*, this is where he points them. You can hold on because He's already loved His own to the end (John 13:1).

Conclusion and Application

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 shows a congregation how love endures:

- A church is shaken when it loves something more than the truth, and it's steadied by loving the truth it was given.
- Before Paul commands anything, he reminds the church that it's loved, chosen, set apart, called, and headed for glory.
- The two commands are plural and practical: stand firm together, and hold to the teaching the apostles handed over.
- Paul prays for the strength to keep them, asking the God who already gave eternal encouragement and good hope to keep encouraging and strengthening the church.
- Christ prayed for this church before Paul did, guarded His own, asked that they would see His glory, and then endured the cross for them.

What unsettles you most easily? When it does, what do you reach for first? And who in this congregation needs you standing next to them this week?

For Thought and Reflection

1. Read Acts 17:1-10 and 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5. What had this young church already been through before the rumor of 2 Thessalonians 2:2 arrived?

2. Paul names a prophecy, a message, and a letter as possible sources of the rumor (2:2). Where do the rumors that unsettle Christians come from today?

3. The deceived perish *because they did not accept the love of the truth* (2:10). What's the difference between knowing the truth and loving it? What else are you tempted to love more?

4. List what God does in 2:13-14 and 2:16. Why do you think Paul spends so much of the paragraph on God's action before he gives a command?

5. How does knowing the destination in 2:14 help you handle hardship along the way?

6. *Stand firm* and *hold to* are both plural. What does that say about who is responsible for a brother's or sister's endurance?

7. Paul answered a counterfeit letter by telling the church to hold what it had received. How can you tell the difference between the apostles' teaching and a voice that only claims their authority?

8. Paul sent Timothy *to strengthen and encourage* the church (1 Thessalonians 3:2), and later prayed for God to do the same thing (2 Thessalonians 2:17). How do those two fit together? Who could God use you to strengthen?

9. Endurance shows up *in every good work and word* (2:17). What good work or good word could you keep doing while the times are unsettled?

10. Read John 17:11-24 beside 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5. What did Jesus ask for His people that Paul also asks for? How does knowing the Lord prayed for you change the way you hold on?

Looking Ahead

Lesson 12 – Love in Generosity, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

2 Thessalonians 2 showed a shaken church holding on because God had loved it first. The next lesson shows churches like it giving. Thessalonica was a city of Macedonia, and when Paul wanted to stir Corinth to give, he pointed to the Macedonians. *We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia: During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part,* 2 Corinthians 8:1-2. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 before class, and notice where grace enters the paragraph in verse 1 and where it lands in verse 9.

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[63] *Saleuthēnai*, "to be shaken," BDAG, s.v. σαλεύω. Luke uses the same verb for the foundations of the jail at Acts 16:26, and for the men from Thessalonica who followed Paul to Berea *agitating* the crowds at Acts 17:13. Paul adds *apo tou noos*, literally "from your mind," which is why some versions read "shaken in mind." *Throeisthai*, "to be disturbed, frightened," BDAG, s.v. θροέω, occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only at Matthew 24:6 and Mark 13:7.

[64] Paul's verb at 2:5 is the imperfect *elegon*, "I used to say," which points to repeated teaching during the founding visit. Interpreters have long differed over the identity of the man of lawlessness (2:3) and over what, or who, restrains him (2:6-7). The lesson leaves those questions open and follows Paul's own emphasis.

[65] *Ēgapēmenoi hypo kyriou*, the perfect passive participle of *agapaō*, the same form Paul uses at Colossians 3:12 (see Lesson 10, endnote 56) and at 1 Thessalonians 1:4, where the Thessalonians are loved by God. The other two loves of the chapter are *tēn agapēn tēs alētheias*, "the love of the truth" (2:10), and *ho agapēsas hēmas*, "who has loved us" (2:16).

[66] The CSB prints *ap' archēs*, "from the beginning," and notes the reading *aparchēn*, "firstfruit," BDAG, s.v. ἀπαρχή. In manuscripts written without spaces between words the two readings differ by a single letter. Paul calls early converts a firstfruit at Romans 16:5 and 1 Corinthians 16:15. The verb *chosen* is *heilato*, from *haireō*, BDAG, s.v. αἱρέω, a different word from the *eklektoi* of Colossians 3:12.

[67] *Stēkete*, from *stēkō*, "to stand firm," BDAG, s.v. στήκω, also at 1 Thessalonians 3:8, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Galatians 5:1, Philippians 1:27, and Philippians 4:1. *Krateite*, from *krateō*, "to hold fast," BDAG, s.v. κρατέω. *Paradoseis*, "traditions," BDAG, s.v. παράδοσις, from *paradidōmi*, "to hand over." Paul uses the noun for the teaching he delivered at 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, and the verb at 1 Corinthians 15:3. Jesus uses the same noun at Mark 7:8-9 for human tradition that sets aside the command of God. The word itself is neutral; the source decides its worth.

[68] The two subjects, *ho kyrios hēmōn Iēsous Christos* and *ho theos ho patēr hēmōn*, take the singular optatives *parakalesai* and *stērixai* (2:17). Paul does the same at 1 Thessalonians 3:11, where the singular *kateuthynai*, "direct," follows God the Father and the Lord Jesus. There the Father is named first; here the Son is.

[69] *Ho agapēsas hēmas kai dous* is a pair of aorist participles, "who loved us and gave," under a single article. *Paraklēsin aiōnian*, "eternal encouragement," BDAG, s.v. παράκλησις; *elpida agathēn*, "good hope"; *en chariti*, "by grace." The noun *paraklēsis*

(2:16) is given, and the verb *parakaleō* (2:17) is requested. Paul uses the noun again at 2 Corinthians 8:4 and the verb at 8:6, in the text of Lesson 12.

[70] *Stērizō*, "to fix firmly, strengthen," BDAG, s.v. στηρίζω. Paul uses it at 1 Thessalonians 3:2 and 3:13 and at 2 Thessalonians 2:17 and 3:3. It is the verb of Luke 22:32 (Lesson 5), and of Luke 9:51, where Jesus resolved to journey to Jerusalem, literally "fixed his face." *Every good work, panti ergō agathō*, anticipates 2 Corinthians 9:8, the text of Lesson 13.

[71] *Tēn hypomonēn tou Christou*, "Christ's endurance," may mean the endurance Christ showed or the patient waiting for Christ, and the CSB leaves both open. The noun *hypomonē* is the *perseverance* of 2 Thessalonians 1:4. Its verb stands behind *endures all things* at 1 Corinthians 13:7, the epigraph of Part Three.

[72] *Phylassō*, "to guard," BDAG, s.v. φυλάσσω: *ephylaxa*, "I guarded" (John 17:12), and *phylaxei*, "he will guard" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). At John 17:15 the verb is *tēreō*, "keep, protect," with *ek tou ponērou*; Paul writes *apo tou ponērou*, the phrase of Matthew 6:13.