

Series: **Confident Hope**
Today's Title: **"Stand Firm"**

July 17, 2022 – 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 – Sermon 25 of 28

Objective: To help Christians grow in confidence of their salvation and the future.

11:00 Service: Comments about having the Next Gen Kids with us in the worship service during the month of July.

Our dog is easily overcome by fear and panic.

I enjoy monsoon season with the storms, lightning, and hopefully good rains.

But our dog...not so much!

She spends many hours in our closet – or under our bed.

It's been proven that fear is a great motivator.

Fear will cause you to change your routine – begin doing something different.

Many great athletes have used the fear of failure to motivate them to work harder – to practice longer than other players.

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school varsity basketball team when he was a sophomore.

When he saw he didn't make the varsity team, one article said, *"The decision made young Mike Jordan go home and cry."*

Later, in a 1997 interview with Jay Leno, Jordan told him,

"In terms of the best thing that could happen to me was to get cut, because it made me go back and get caught up with my skill level at my height." (As a sophomore in high school Jordan was 5'9".)

Fear of failure motivates some to greater things.

But it causes others to freeze – to give up.

We even have a term for this: Paralyzing fear.

Fear of the unknown, fear of calamity, fear of sickness, disease, and death, fear of people, fear of losing our jobs, fear of enemy attacks, fear of being misunderstood . . . or rejected . . . or criticized . . . or forgotten . . . or being mistreated.

Fear has run its course through our nation – through the world since March 2020.

Being fearful is not so much a result of being weak.

In most cases, it's realizing you are not in control.

It's the realization that your fate is in someone else's hands.

That's incredibly frightening when that someone is not very capable – or even evil!

The Thessalonians were like many Christians today – they were fearful about the future.

This was in part due to the false teaching they had followed in the counterfeit letter they thought was from Paul.

But even before that letter, they had an intense fear that their deceased loved ones and friends were going to miss out on the rapture of the Church.

They were also enduring intense persecution – which produced increasing levels of fear and anxiety in them.

We read the Bible – not as a history lesson – but to hear God’s revealed word – so He can speak to us – in our life today!

- Do current trends and events in our world produce fear and anxiety in you?
- Are you ever fearful of the future?
- Do you ever doubt your salvation?
- Do you ever wonder if God really...really loves you?
- Even though you’re a Christian – a disciple of Jesus – are you ever fearful that you might not be good enough – obedient enough?

Our passage today will help us deal with these fears – with our doubts and the modern-day challenges to our faith and our confidence in God’s promises.

Opening Prayer

Turn to **2 Thessalonians 2:13-17** – p. 989

Paul didn’t live in a fantasy world.

He didn’t live with his head in the sand – ignorant of the reality around him.

He knew the dangers of life more than most of us!

He was attacked, beaten, and under constant threat and danger because of his faith in Christ and his Apostolic ministry.

In the next chapter – he appealed to the Thessalonian believers,

“...pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.” – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

- Was Paul ever afraid? Absolutely!

- Did he live in fear? Absolutely not!

He lived with an awareness of the danger of life, but he also lived with a confidence in the power and plan of God.

- Could God protect him from being beat up? Yes!

- Did God always protect him from getting beat up? No!

Paul’s faith was not built on – rooted in – his circumstances. His faith was deeply rooted in the person and nature of God – of Christ.

It was also deeply rooted in his calling as an Apostle – and the Gospel work he was fully committed to.

His compassion for lost people was greater than his desire for safety or comfort.

Let’s see what we can learn from our passage today – and how it can encourage us to increase our confidence in God – and His calling on our life.

Read vs. 13-14

Chosen for glory, not judgment. vs. 13-14

There is so much packed into these 2 verses!

I want to focus on 3 things.

First, you are loved by God. vs. 13a

“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord...”

God’s love for you is clearly stated many times in Scripture.

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world”

His love was the motivation of the incarnation and the cross.

The Apostle John – in his letters – tells us that God is love! (1 John 4:8)

God’s love is not fickle – not arbitrary.

His love is unconditional – meaning it is not dependent on how we live.

It’s not dependent on what we do – or what we don’t do. His love is never-ending – and we can never plumb the depths of His love.

Second, God chose you / elected you for salvation. vs. 13b-14a

“...because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through our gospel...”

The doctrine of God’s sovereign election is difficult for many Christians to understand and accept.

Playground protocols often involved choosing teams.

This always has an overtone of unfairness because:

1. The captains were often self-appointed by the 2 strongest or most popular kids.

2. The captains sometimes chose their friends, not the best players.

3. The last person chosen was never wanted – but they still had to be picked – which they were reluctantly.

Playground choosing is nothing like God’s choosing.

God’s sovereign choice is based in the person and nature of God, not in the merit of the person chosen.

God is perfect in every way.

Perfectly just, holy, righteous – incapable of doing wrong or in being untruthful.

Some protest God’s sovereign election on the basis of those who aren’t elected unto salvation!

This boils down to 2 things:

1. The assumption that all people deserve salvation. The truth is “None is righteous – no, not one.” (Rom. 3:10).

2. It feels unfair – like the playground choosing of sides. God is loving and gracious and it’s amazing that He chooses anyone to be saved!

His choosing of the elect does not mean others don’t have the offer of salvation. This is what theologians refer to as the *‘general call of God’*, which is the universal, indiscriminate preaching and proclamation of the Gospel message to all people. The offer of salvation to all people is a real and genuine offer.

Matthew 11:28

“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

In response to hearing the Gospel, many, many people will reject it – refuse to believe it – refuse to think it’s important at all!

Matthew 7:13

“For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.”

Their unbelief is not caused by God, but as we saw in last week’s passage, God seals some people in their unbelief.

Romans 1:20 makes it clear that Creation alone presents enough evidence of the existence of God – of a Creator – and that evidence is enough that unbelievers are “without excuse” for their unbelief.

One of the amazing things about the sovereign choice of God for those who will be saved is when He made that choice.

He didn’t choose you when He saw how you live.

He didn’t choose you when He saw what family you were born into – or what church you attend.

He chose you before the creation of the world – before time even began!!!

In the ESV – which I’m reading from – it translates part of **vs. 13** - “God chose you as the first fruits to be saved”

The term translated “first fruits” is debated among translation scholars.

Many believe this translation fails to capture the sense of what Paul is saying here – because “first fruits” is most commonly understood as referring to the first ones in that area – the first converts in Thessalonica or in that region.

But that really isn't what Paul is saying – and it isn't what he typically says when writing about the sovereign choice of God in salvation. In addition, the Thessalonian's were not the first converts in that region – those in Philippi were.

A better translation of this Greek term in this context is probably “from the beginning” (NASB) which would communicate to the readers the amazing truth that God had chosen them to be His own from eternity past – from before time began!

2 Timothy 1:9

“For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan from before the beginning of time—to show us His grace through Christ Jesus.”

Titus 1:1-2

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began...”

Some don't like God's sovereign election because they believe it takes away or diminishes human free will – human choice. But...

- We are not saved because we're smart enough to figure out God's plan of salvation.
- We're not saved because we are wise enough to have reasoned it out in our mind.

We're saved by grace, through the work of God in our life – regenerating our dead soul with His life.

But God's sovereign election does not dismiss our responsibility to have faith – belief in Jesus!

“...and belief in the truth.”

This is the part that is a challenge to our finite understanding.

God sovereignly chooses those who will be saved. The Bible is clear and unapologetic on this truth.

At the same time, the Bible is clear and unapologetic that each person must decide to put their faith in Jesus. Each person is responsible to believe in Christ and seek Him as their Savior.

These are not contradictory truths.

They are both true, but how they work together is where the mystery lies!

“...and belief in the truth.”

Have you believed in the truth of the Gospel?

Third, God chose you to enjoy His glory. vs. 14b

“...so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This targets one of the dominant fears of the Thessalonian believers.

They were struggling and fearful that even though they believed in Jesus as their Savior they were going to experience the judgment of God.

But Paul tells them they are destined to “...obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In his first letter to them he wrote:

1 Thessalonians 2:12

“...we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

1 Thessalonians 5:9

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Christian – God has chosen you - called you - saved you – so you can share in His glory for all eternity!

This is, in part, what Peter was writing about in his first letter.

1 Peter 1:4

“...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...”

Can anything in this world match up with that??

The Christian’s responsibility with what we’ve been given. vs.

After Paul comforts them by telling them they are loved by God, chosen by God, and destined to “obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ”, Paul now shares the responsibility which comes with such divine blessings.

This is how it works in life now.

Even though we may know examples of those who have little regard or appreciation for the blessings in their life and they live in ways that demonstrate that lack of appreciation, there is a sense we all have when someone is greatly blessed – especially through no merit of their own - that they should respond to that blessing with a degree of humility – and responsibility.

When I first heard about the donation our church was to receive – I was overjoyed – shocked – excited – but at the same time I was overwhelmed with the weight of it – the responsibility that comes with such blessings!

vs. 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.”

Paul gives 2 commands in this verse -

“stand firm” and “hold”.

These are both in the present tense –

‘Keep on standing firm’ and *‘continue to hold’*.

Because of the great things God has given you.

Because He loves you - has chosen you for salvation and glory – keep standing firm in your faith.

A lot of times, if we state the opposite, we can get a better sense of what is being said.

For that, all we have to do is look at **vs. 2**.

“...we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed...”

“Stand firm...hold”

Hold onto what?

Hold tightly to the “traditions”.

Traditions is one of those words:

Some people love it – some push back against it.

What does Paul mean by “traditions”?

In some churches, the traditions become idols.

Traditions normally help us remember the importance of something.

By their very existence, they point to a time, event, or practice that is important to remember.

But what often happens is over time, the tradition becomes the focus.

In some instances, traditions are placed on the same level of importance and sacredness as Scripture itself.

This happened with the Jewish people – especially the religious establishment in Jesus’ day.

Mark 7:9

And Jesus said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!”

Their traditions became more important – more loved – than the commands of Scripture.

The word Paul uses means: *‘handing down or over tradition or instruction’*.

Paul was not handing down or over the traditions of Judaism to them.

He was handing down or over the instruction about Jesus – about the Gospel.

“...either by our spoken word or by our letter.”

This tells us that Paul viewed his letters as authoritative – to be obeyed by the readers.

Paul then closes this section of the letter with:

A prayer for every Christian. vs. 16-17

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,

17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

Paul does something here that is very profound for our understanding of Jesus.

In the Greek, “Himself” is in the emphatic position – the first word in the sentence.

It’s also a singular pronoun – very important.

He then reverses the normal word order.

“God our Father” normally is first in order, followed by “Lord Jesus Christ”.

But Paul lists Jesus first.

This shows us that Paul saw Jesus and the Father as equal – the order didn’t matter – whether “God our Father” was first or “Lord Jesus Christ” – there wasn’t a theological reason for a specific order.

Back to the singular pronoun, “Himself”.

Paul uses a singular pronoun to modify both Jesus and the Father – which is a strong affirmation of the deity of Jesus and His equality with the Father.

Jesus is the 2nd person of the Triune God – God incarnate – of the same essence of the Father – of equal value of the Father – but in love Jesus submits to the Father’s will.

Theologian’s call this the *‘Economic Submission’* in the Trinity.

Economic – not referring to money, but to relationship or roles – function.

So, the first part of **vs. 16** is a powerful statement about the deity of Jesus.

The 2nd part of **vs. 16**:

Paul talks about “eternal comfort and good hope through grace...”

Remember the purpose of his letter was to give his readers comfort and hope in light of God's judgment and the future Day of the Lord.

Based on what he has written in these verses, the believer should realize the depth of their salvation.

They are saved not because they were lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and they just happened to hear Paul, Silas or one of his church planting team share about the Gospel.

God, before time began, loved them, and chose them for salvation.

They are destined not for wrath, but for the glory of God!

This gives the believer "eternal comfort and good hope through grace..."

The action point for them:

Find "comfort" in these truths.

"Comfort your hearts"

This is the deliberate action of the believer to focus on the truths of God and the truths of the Gospel.

This is being "transformed by the renewing of your mind".

This is the truth of God changing you from the inside – from your heart!

"...establish them (your hearts) in every good work and word."

This is the 'how' they were to comfort their hearts.

Through “every good work and word.”

- By loving others.
- By serving others.
- By doing good things for others.
- By hearing the word of God.
- By knowing / studying / meditating on the word of God.

By doing these things, their hearts would be comforted

Apply it...

Salvation brings you God’s glory, not His judgment.

Don’t fear the future. You are God’s child!

The gift and blessing of salvation should lead to a changed life.

“Stand firm...hold to the traditions (Gospel)”!!

Your changed life should be a heart issue, not just new behavior.

vs. 17 – “comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

Closing prayer