

Stand Firm Throughout Your Spiritual Transformation

2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:5

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

3 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. ² And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. ⁴ We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Review our *Stand Firm* series:

- Stand Firm during times of suffering.
- Stand Firm through times of great deception.

Today: Stand Firm throughout your spiritual transformation. Our spiritual transformation is God shaping us into the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29; 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:6). More of Jesus, less of me.

I. Why Stand Firm in our Spiritual Transformation? (vv. 13-14)

A. Why Stand Firm? Because of the Incredible Contrast Between the World and Believers

Notice, this passage begins with the word *but*, which signals a contrast. This passage follows the Paul's description of the terrible conditions which will happen under the antichrist at the end of the age.

Look at the sharp contrasts between the previous topics of judgment, eternal punishment, apostasy, and the Man of Sin, with salvation, sanctification, security, grace, hope, and the Lord Jesus Christ. In contrast to those who refuse to love and obey the truth, we now have those who are willing to do both. In contrast to those who follow the Antichrist - here are those who follow Christ. In contrast to rebellion, is a picture of those who walk in relationship with Christ. In contrast to eternal judgment is eternal glorification. This passage is filled with bright hope and encouragement.

This is the typical response to eschatology, teaching on the end times. He is saying that no matter how bad things become in the world, Christians are expected to Stand Firm!

B. Why Stand Firm? Because of all That God has Provided for Us (vv. 13-14)

In verses 13 and 14 we find seven features of our salvation which we need to be reminded of often.

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, [1] brothers loved by the Lord, [2] because from the beginning God chose you [3] to be saved [4] through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and [5] through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this [6] through our gospel, [7] that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. We're Loved by God "brothers loved by the Lord"

How amazing to know that God loves us even though he knows everything about us! He knows our likes and dislikes, the wrong things we have done, the evil thoughts, the whole sorry mess -- yet he still loves us! I am reminded of the jingle that expresses this so well,

Isn't it odd,
that a Being like God,
Who sees the facade,
still loves the clod
He made out of sod;
now isn't that odd?

2. We're Chosen by God "because from the beginning God chose you..."

God's sovereignty and man's free will dwell side by side throughout the Scriptures. Human and divine responsibility are linked together as the divine initiative seeks and awaits human response.

The Bible consistently teaches that the initiative in salvation comes from God, not man. Salvation begins and ends with God. Our own merit can do nothing to save us. We must freely accept God's gift of salvation. There is no other way to receive the forgiveness for our sin.

3. We're Saved by God "...to be saved..."

The word "salvation" has a multitude of meaning. Most of all it means a restored relationship with Him

4. We're Sanctified by God "...through the sanctifying work of the Spirit..."

5. We're Given Truth by God "...and through belief in the truth."

6. We're Given the Gospel by God "He called you to the through our gospel..."

7. We Given the Glory of God "...that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The word “glory” refers to the “substance,” or “weightiness” of Jesus. We’ll be filled with the substance that fulfills to the maximum.

These verses constitute a marvelous survey of the whole sweep of Christian truth. Here, in a nutshell, the apostle presents deep theological truth in a marvelously compact way.

II. **How to Stand Firm in your Spiritual Transformation (vv. 2:15-3:5)**

A. **Tenaciously Cling to God’s Word (v. 15)**

¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

“So then, brothers...” As a result of all that God has provided for us, we respond by standing firm.

1. **Love the Word**

In today’s wish-washy world we need to be lovers of the word more than ever before! Christians are in constant danger of being swept downstream by the currents of our culture. We need to take tenacious hold of God’s word and not let go.

Several years ago, a pilot named Henry Dempsey was flying his 15-passenger plane from Maine to Boston. At 4,000 feet he heard a noise where the rear stairs were located. He turned the controls over to his co-pilot and walked to the back of the plane. As he was making his way to the back, they hit some turbulence and he was slammed against the door and it fell open. He was sucked part way out of the plane, fell face down on the steps and grabbed for anything that might save his life. His hands caught a railing and he held on with everything he had.

The co-pilot thought Dempsey had fallen out and diverted the flight to a nearby airport. When he landed he found Dempsey with his face 12 inches above the runway, with his hands so tight around the rails that his fingers had to be pried off, one by one

2. **Live the Word**

- Trust God
- Never give up 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 (NIV84) ¹³ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. ¹⁴ Do everything in love.
- Resist the traps of the enemy
- Live to please Him

B. **Persistently Pray (vv. 2:16-3:2)**

1. **Pray for Your Personal Transformation (vv. 16-17)**

¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

- Encouragement (v 16)
The Greek word for “encouragement” was used to describe one’s counsel in a lawsuit, and carried the idea of standing alongside to strengthen, encourage, and support. Notice, we receive “eternal encouragement”.
- Hope (as opposed to false hope given by the antichrist) (v. 16)
In an age of growing despair, how powerful is God’s hope. It’s called good hope. That good hope is grounded in God’s grace. He will never disappoint us or let us down.
- Motivation to Keep Going (v. 17) “encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”
“Encourage” could be translated as “established” or “strengthen”. It’s from the word used for a column in a building.
“In every good deed and word” is God’s Love flowing into our hearts, and God’s love flowing out to humanity.

2. Pray for Everyone Else’s Spiritual Transformation (vv. 3:1-2)

¹Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. ²And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.

It is not unusual for Paul to ask for prayer for himself. There are at least five other times in his letters where he personally asks for prayer (Romans 15:30-32; 2 Corinthians 1:9-11; Ephesians 6:17-21; Philippians 1:15-20; Colossians 4:3-4). He was a man committed to the practice of prayer for others and he longed to have people pray for him as well. In his mind, his preaching could not be separated from the prayers of others.

Notice that Paul isn’t asking for his situation to improve, or for his health, or anything like that. He basically wants believers in Thessalonica to pray two things for him and his team located in Corinth.

- Pray for Proclamation (v. 3:1)
“pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored...”

...The first thing he asks is that people would pray for the proclamation of the gospel. He wants the message of the Lord to spread “rapidly,” which conjures up the image of a runner who is racing at full speed. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is alive and active. He also wants this message to be “honored,” which means to “be magnified” or “to be rendered glorious.” As the gospel does its work, lives are radically changed, and Jesus is made “bigger” in believers. Acts 13:48 describes how the Gentiles rendered the gospel

glorious: "...They were glad and honored the word of the Lord..." God's Word will always accomplish God's work.

"...just as it was with you." The Thessalonians certainly honored the gospel as we learned in 1 Thessalonians 1:8: "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-your faith in God has become known everywhere."

Paul is asking that the same thing happen in Corinth as had occurred in Thessalonica. God had wonderfully blessed the apostle's work there. In just three short weeks of preaching in the synagogue, God had established a church, calling people out of the darkness in which they had been bound, to partake in a living, vibrant church. That is the power of the Word of God! Just as that word spread rapidly among them, revealing its glory and its ability to change people, Paul now asks for prayer that the darkness of Corinth be similarly penetrated by the gospel.

- Pray for Protection (v. 2)

²And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.

Paul had first asked for the message to flourish in verse 1. Now, Paul asks for prayer for the messenger to flourish in verse 2. Specifically, he desires to be delivered from "wicked and evil men." The word "wicked" describes those who were out of line and out of place, men who direct themselves and others away from that which is good and right. "Evil" means malignant, a word that was used to describe Satan himself.

That last phrase suggests that the opposition he faced was coming from within the church itself. There were people in the church who claimed to be believers but they had no real faith and were making things difficult for Paul. It is interesting to note that he does not ask for the elimination of this opposition, but only that he might be delivered through it. God does not often take our trials away. If you ask him to do so he probably will not do so because he knows your need for trial. What he does promise is that he will take you through it.

C. Thrive in Your Relationship with Jesus (vv. 3-5)

³But the Lord is faithful, and he will **strengthen** and **protect you** from the evil one. ⁴We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will **continue** to do the things we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

1. When we Walk in a Thriving Relationship with Jesus, we are Confident that He is our Faithful Provider (v. 3-4)

- Strength

"If God be for you, who can be against you?" Romans 8:31

- Protection

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.”

- Consistency (v. 4)

“We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.”

Christians should be the same day in and day out. We should refuse to become upset and thrown off by circumstances so that they end up responding like the world around.

2. When we Walk in a Thriving Relationship with Jesus, we are Confident that He is our Faithful Director (v. 5)

“May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.”

The love of God gives us security, and the patience of Christ give us consistency, the quality that this age needs more than anything else.

Christ Himself is the definition of perseverance (hypomone’ = “steadfastness, to remain or abide under”) for He took upon Himself and bore the sin of the world until He had completely paid for your sin and mine. He took the rejection and the shame of the cross and used it for the redemption of humankind.

Conclusion

I love the story of Charles Spurgeon, known as the “prince of preachers,” who was giving a tour of his facility to a group of fellow pastors, and asked if they wanted to see the boiler-room. They hesitantly said sure, and Charles led them to the basement where they found a room with over 100 people in prayer. “This”, he said, “is my boiler room.” We need that.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be sanctified or “set apart” from the world? Read 1 John 2:15-17.
2. Out of the seven features of our salvation that are listed in 2:13-14, which one or two stand out as your favorite(s)?
3. How do we “hold onto the teachings” of God’s word in our confused world. What encourages you to “stand firm and hold on”?
4. How does 3:1-5 portray the role and importance of prayer in the spread of the Gospel?
5. Reflect on Paul’s request for prayer in 3:1-2. How can this shape your prayer life in your current circumstances?