



Called to Believe and Be Glorified in Jesus Christ

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 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. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not infrequent in Scripture that God has chosen to put some of his strongest pronouncements of condemnation immediately beside some of his most comforting announcements of mercy, grace, and salvation. Noticing this, the casual or critical reader of the Bible might accuse God of being inconsistent or having contrary wills, but he is none of these. Rather these mutually opposing truths are two opposing doctrines, the law and the gospel, which God has designed to keep us sinners on the narrow way of faith in Jesus. The primary purpose of the law is to expose the damning nature of our sins and selfishness and the empty sham of our own self-righteousness. On the other hand, the gospel promise us that there is free grace and forgiveness and mercy and eternal life with God through Jesus Christ. No one is too far gone or gone too long, that God cannot or does not want them back.

Our text for today is the gospel-half of that law-gospel coin. In the previous verses Paul had announced God's dreadful and eternal judgment on all who like the Antichrist refuse to love the truth and be saved. However, when we sinners hear God's law, it equally condemns us all. Every one of us must admit in our hearts that we have not loved and respected and treasured the saving word of God like we should. We frequently and easily put devotional time in the Scriptures low on our list of priorities, like it's only an afterthought once everything else is done. If God were giving us what we deserve, we should be cast aside and condemned with all the rest, but Paul here gives us the gospel to allay our fears.

Why aren't we among those who disparage the Scriptures and God's truth? Well, it's not because of us. Not because we are better or smarter or more spiritual than other people. It's all about what God has done. He loved us and still loves us. His love is what moved him to choose us in eternity before the beginning of the world to be sanctified. In this context the word "sanctify" means to set apart as holy for God. He made us his own through belief in the truth, not by our doing or our reasoning or our goodness but through his gift of faith. We believe because God called us to himself through the gospel, that "good news" that Jesus is God's Son who died to take away our sins and give us life forever with God. Paul says God did all this "so that we might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," so that we will experience the miracle of our lowly mortal bodies being transformed to be like our Savior's resurrected body and the bliss of living with him in heaven. What a wonderful and glorious God we have, who loved us so much that he has called us to his truth and glory! And so we Lutherans gladly confess in the words of Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith." This is most certainly true! God be praised!

Prayer: *Holy Father in heaven how blessed we are and what a comfort it is to know that our salvation is neither our doing nor in our hands, but it is your work, and therefore we can live each day confident that you will continue to strengthen and keep us in true faith in Jesus by the power of your Holy Spirit until by your grace we are at last with him in glory. Amen.*