



Hold On to the Word!

2 Thessalonians 2:15-17 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

One of my favorite summertime hobbies is gardening. While I'm no botanist, I do my best to tend to the flowers and trees on the church property and grow herbs and vegetables in some garden plots. But whether you're an amateur gardener, a full-time farmer, or just have a few potted plants to brighten up your home, anytime we plant a garden, a flower, or a field, the goal is not only to have *living* plants, but plants that thrive and are fruitful. Such is what our Lord wants for us too! God's overwhelming desire is to save as many people as possible through faith in his Son. He wants us to be with him for all eternity. However, he also wants us to be fruitful and productive in Jesus *right now*. Jesus once used the illustration of himself being the life-giving vine and believers being the fruit-producing branches (cf. John 15:1ff). We are made spiritually alive by being connected to Jesus by faith and having now been made alive, we are enabled to cooperate with his grace and power to produce God-pleasing thoughts, words, and deeds of love. However, if that fruitfulness is to continue, we must remain constantly connected to Christ. He says that connection is maintained by remaining in his Word (John 15:7-8). In these verses of 2 Thessalonians Paul speaks much the same substance as our Savior, just with different words.

Like Christ, Paul commands us to exert all our energy in seizing onto the life-giving word, which God has given us through his designated apostles and prophets: *stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you*. Sadly, many abuse God's grace as an excuse to be passive in their faith. Their sinful flesh deceives them into believing that since our good works aren't required to earn God's love or get us into heaven, then we need not do much at all, but true Christianity is not for the casual believer, spiritual couch potato, slacker, or coaster. We are to be active in holding onto that Word of God by which Jesus Christ and God our Father enliven and empower us:

- Therein we receive encouragement and strength from our Savior when we are weak, lonely, and unloved. He lifts our eyes from this weary world of trouble and tears to the promised heavenly joys that will soon be ours.
- In a perverse and morally confused society, the Scriptures provide God-given guidance in what is truly good and right that transcends time and culture and petty human arguments.
- While our fellowman is fearful about wars and the weather and the stress on economic and political systems, we have hope. We have hope now that what appears to be chaos is fully under Christ's control, and we have hope for the life to come.

By standing on God's Word and holding it close to our hearts, we are made resilient to the unpredictable shocks of life and strengthened to do what is right so we remain fruitful to the very end.

Prayer: Lord God, there are so many temptations that daily surround me, trying to loosen my grip on your Word--temptations of time and entertainment, the temptation to seek human wisdom or my own self-reliance. By your same Word give me the wisdom to see through these lies, that in your heavenly teachings I have direction, hope, courage, and power to live a godly life for you here and forever. Amen.