

A Study of 2 Thessalonians



In the previous lesson we learned about the man of lawlessness and the terrible end that awaits him and those who follow him. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul shifts his thoughts to his thankfulness for the salvation of the Thessalonian Christians, their love and obedience to the truth, and his prayer that they may continue to grow in their faith.

The Value of Salvation 2:13-14

Paul begins in an interesting way by saying that we “ought always to give thanks to God for you...” The word “ought” tells us that he viewed this prayer of thanks as an obligation. According to the context, the word can be translated as bound, or debt, or owe. In other words, this is not just something Paul would like to do, but he viewed praying with thanks, for his Thessalonian brothers and sisters in Christ, a solemn duty.

1. **Why would Paul feel obligated to thank God for the salvation of the Thessalonian Christians?**
2. **What lessons can we learn from Paul’s obligation to thank God for the salvation of the Thessalonian Christians?**

There are a some interesting and important words found verse 13. First, we read that God “**chose**” these Christians. They were chosen because they obeyed the gospel. They were chosen through the sanctification by the Sprit and belief in the truth. God loves each person equally and does not desire any to perish.¹ He does not choose one to be saved and one to be lost arbitrarily, but rather chooses to receive all who will accept and obey him.

Salvation depends on two parties: God and man. Man stands guilty and condemned before God because of his sin. God’s holiness and justice demands punishment, but the gracious God sent his own Son to pay the penalty for man’s sin. The death of the sinless Jesus serves as the payment of death required by man’s sin.

God's gift of salvation is freely available to all who will love and obey him. This is where “belief in the truth” comes in. Man has free-will to accept or reject God’s offer of forgiveness. This gracious call to salvation and forgiveness comes through the preaching of the truth of the gospel.²



¹ 2 Peter 3:9.

² Romans 10:17

There is nothing that man can do to initiate or earn his salvation. Man's salvation is only possible because of God's initiative and Christ's death. Outside of Christ a man is dead in his sins and dead man is unable take any action to help himself. Yet salvation depends upon man accepting the gracious gift of salvation that God offers.

The Holy Spirit takes residence in the lives of all those who obey the truth³ bringing us to our second important word which is “**sanctification.**” This word means “to be set apart.” God, through the Holy Spirit, sets a Christian apart for himself and his purposes. A believer will grow in sanctification as he becomes more and more like Christ. Aided by the Holy Spirit within him a believer increasingly bears spiritual fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.



Though a Christian must obey the word of truth, it is the Holy Spirit who is the origin of truth. God reveals truth to man through the Holy Spirit inspired Bible. When a man believes and obeys what God reveals through the Spirit he begins the process of sanctification.

3. Why do we call sanctification a process?

A third interesting word in verse 13 is “**firstfruits.**” This word referred to the first part of any crop or livestock that was offered to God before the rest was used. The word is found nine times in the New Testament and is used of Christians six times.⁴ The word, when referring to Christians, simply means that they belong to God; they are his harvest. James 1:18 says, “According to his sovereign plan, he brought us into being through his word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”⁵

4. Does a man's acceptance and obedience to the truth take anything away from salvation being called a “free gift?”⁶ Explain your answer.

³ Acts 2:38

⁴ Greek word *aparche* is used of Christians in Rom. 8:23; 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Thess 2:13; James 1:18; and Rev 14:4.

⁵ There is a manuscript variation in one word in verse 13. Some Greek manuscripts have the word *aparchēn* (firstfruits) while others have the word *archēs* which is translated “from the beginning.” In the original Greek written in uncial (or capital) letters only one Greek letter separated these words. It is easy to see how a scribe could easily add or delete one letter by error. The context is true whichever word was originally written by Paul. If the word *archēs* is original then the idea is that God made the choice to save those chosen because of their obedience from before the Creation. The meaning of the verse is unchanged with either word: Christians belong to God and are chosen by their obedience to be sanctified by the Spirit. It seems most likely that firstfruits was original (Anyone who is interested should read Jon Weatherly's comments in The College Press NIV Commentary for a discussion of this issue.)

⁶ Rom 5:15-17; 6:23.

5. According to verse 14, how did God call the Thessalonian Christians?

Verse 14 begins with words translated as “To this.” These words refer to what Paul has just written and tell us that the Lord called them to salvation, sanctification, and the truth. The purpose of this calling was so that they might obtain the “glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The calling came through the gospel (the good news).

Sanctification is a process and Paul is now looking to the end result of the process which is that a Christian will share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glory belongs to him because he is God and he is further glorified through his death, burial, and resurrection. He will come in glory and Christians will share in his glory.

There is a constant threat from false teachers and deceivers like the lawless one in the first part of this chapter. Because of this Paul instructs the believers to 1) Stand firm and 2) Hold on to the traditions they had been taught.

6. In what ways might false teaching come to the Thessalonian Christians? (see 2 Thess 2:2)

Standing and holding indicate a continuous effort to not be moved from the teaching of the apostles whether the teaching came verbally when Paul was present or in an inspired letter he sent.

What one believes matters very much because of the battle between that which is true and that which is false and designed to deceive.



Salvation and truth are linked in 2:10, 13 and condemnation comes to those who believe what is false (2:11-12). A love, believe, and obedience to the truth found in the Word of God divides those who are saved and those who are condemned.

7. What is a tradition and why does Paul use that word in 2:15?

The traditions of which Paul speaks are not man made or man designed. These are traditions (meant to be passed on to succeeding generations) which are grounded in truth as revealed to man by God. A God given tradition does not change through time so that the traditions that Paul taught in Scripture are equally binding on the church of all ages.

This section closes with a prayer that the Thessalonian Christians might be comforted in heart and established in every good work and word through the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

God loved them. God gave “eternal” comfort, and good hope through his grace.



8. The word translated as loved is in a Greek tense that indicates a specific action in time. At what particular time would Paul have in mind where God demonstrated his love for man?

9. What is meant by “eternal comfort” in 2:16?

The Thessalonian Christians, as all Christians, face foes who wish to deceive through falsehood. The remedy is to “stand firm” and “hold on” to the truth taught in God’s Word. Those who are obedient to the truth will find comfort and hope and will be given strength to accomplish their work for Christ.

We can be thankful that our hope is in an eternal God who provides an everlasting comfort and hope through his marvelous grace.