



"Get a Grip..."

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on January 28, 2024

- 2 Thess 2:13 through 3:5

13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification

by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run [swiftly] and be glorified, just as [it is] with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard [you] from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. 5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

2:13-15

Throughout scripture God spoke in terms of adoption to describe his relationship with His people. When it comes to adoption, the child really does nothing. He or she is not the initiator. The parents are the initiator. They are the ones who see it through...step by step, to the end of the process.

Somewhere along the way we as a greater modern church have begun to use language wherein we say we have "invited Jesus into our hearts." Yet one would be hard-pressed to find that language or even that idea in scripture. The fact is, even before we were born, God began the long process of inviting us! While we were still alone in our sin, God was acting to redeem us....to "adopt" us. 1John 4:19 says that "We love Him because He first loved us."

The only way we become a part of the family of God is through an unimaginable act of love that is completely out of our control. Indeed, our free-will plays into this wherein we act in the form of a decision...a 'choice.' But we need to know that Christianity does not begin with our pursuit of Christ. It began with His pursuit of us...all of us.

This lack of understanding of this issue has had a profound effect upon the very doctrines of our faith. For example: We can tend to be taken back...offended even, by God's reaction toward sin in scripture. We read the pages of scripture as well as the pages of the daily news and we find murder, wickedness, sexual immorality, corruption, laziness and unwillingness to place God first and serve Him.

And we also see God's reaction to it all; fire raining down on Sodom and Gomorrah, people being stoned to death for working on the Sabbath, Achan and his family killed for disobeying God and keeping the plunder from the battle in Joshua. Virtually the same happened to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts. Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire for not following God's directions. Even poor Uzzah who died when he touched the Ark of the Covenant. All of this can seem...well, a bit severe, even if we don't want to publicly say so!

The problem is our perspective, because we view sin through modern man centered eyes. Like salvation, we inevitably place ourselves front and center instead of God. We somehow feel that *we* should be the one who decides these things for ourselves. Everything is judged by how it affects us. If our pastor directs us in our behavior we tend to accuse him of being abusive and controlling. We often tend to think the same of God but its hard to post a nasty review about Him and get away with it, so we usually keep those opinions to ourselves.

However, it is imperative that we understand that sin is not measured by us, but rather by the one who is sinned against. If I sin against my dog, I probably will not pay too dearly for it. If I sin against you, there is a greater penalty. If I sin against the infinite holy and eternal God, then I am infinitely guilty and worthy of extreme penalty. Because this is HIS world ultimately...we are merely guests.

The Bible says we, in our natural state, are "dead in our sin." Paul told the Ephesians that "you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live." That's some pretty emphatic language. We aren't just 'damaged goods,' which is the modern world's position. We're **dead**.

When I begin from the position that God is the one in control and I am but the receiver, it puts the authority back on Him and off of me where we tend to place it. We must then realize that we aren't too important in the grand scheme of things...that God is calling all the shots. He is the 'parent' and we are the 'child' being adopted. When I take the perspective that I am the one in control... then that places me in the position of authority and therefore I have the freedom to scrutinize His actions and even criticize his decisions that do not match my own.

Coming off of a rather detailed explanation of the Anti-Christ and the end-days events, Paul goes on now to assure those truly saved that they are really saved and they are really safe in that position. He says that he was "always giving God thanks for them"...for their standing and their salvation and their security. Notice that he is not thanking or praising the Thessalonian believers for the fact that they chose to be children of God...or even because they were faithful in their walks. He was thanking God because He stepped in to save them. Because God made the dead to be alive!

They were born again by a momentary act but moreover through the life-long process of the "sanctification by the Holy Spirit." They had been and *were being* "set apart" by God for salvation but also for a unique use and special mission in life. This fact gives us a clear view of what's going on "behind the curtain" *so to speak*, because we may mistake an emotional moment as our salvation, but we cannot mistake what is a long term continual advancing experience of sanctification. In such, we grow more and more into His image. In our thinking, our actions, our relationships, in our daily priorities.

Thus this is one of those "litmus tests" I am so fond of in scripture. Ways for us to look at our lives to confirm our standing with Him and thus calm our hearts and minds and dispel the doubts that Satan attempts to seed in our hearts. If we are still living in and for the things of this world...we are not really "set apart." We are not living a sanctified life, and such is readily obvious to ourselves and...*however disconcerting it might be*, to those around us also.

Attempting to walk in that nebulous ground of uncertain redemption is incredibly dangerous. It is like walking on thin ice. Every step we try to convince ourselves that we are ok, despite the occasional cracking noises. Everything is fine until the ice breaks and we go under, with a final thought of “where is God” while He is asking *where are you?* Christian standing is not proven by how much we go to church or how many good works we might perform, it is evidenced by a sanctified living wherein Christ in all life matters is first and he or she is consistently moving more and more into that realm.

Note 1 Peter 1 says the following: “*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...*” The “sanctification by the Spirit” **leads us to** and **empowers us for** obedience. That does not mean some level of perfection. But scriptural obedience becomes our mainstay, our center, our living, our determined goal. Is it for you?

They are those who “re-imagine” Christianity into something that better fits their lives and their earthly aspirations. Once again, if I am the one in control, it is much easier therefore to “change the rules”...to alter the “playing field.” We tend to think we can let those old archaic scriptural directives pass away as inconsequential. As if they don’t matter anymore. But God says different!

He says “Stand Fast.” A call to persevere. You see, after telling us of the Anti-Christ and his methods, as well as those that will fall prey to his ways. Paul is contrasting those who are truly saved...those who are standing on safe ground and those who are not. The proof of this is the continuing in God...the forward motion...the faithfulness and maturing of their lives. Paul is encouraging us to not be swayed...to not compromise.

With or without the coming of the Anti-Christ and all he will bring to this planet, we have plenty to distract us and worry us. We watch the news and we are easily apt to get jittery and a little panicky. Paul is attempting to calm our hearts; “You are His. God is here. He has your back. Remain calm! Hang in there. Don’t be moved away from what you know to be right...what scripture says is right.”

There is nothing magical about this. We are simply being told to ‘dig in’ and ‘hold on.’ Yes, it is a matter of commitment and determination. But it is also an understanding that if you ARE there, God will be there for you and hold on to *you*. Notice that he in no way paints a picture that it is or even should be easy. Nothing that has such value ever is.

2:16-17

Paul ends this section with a prayer... rightfully so... because if there is no ‘magic’ to survival here, then the Spirit of God is all we have. But rest assured, such is more than sufficient! The context is crucial because the prayer flows directly from the doctrine of God’s sovereignty (supreme power and freedom from external control) and from His command to stand firm.

First, we must remember that God is the source of all power. All the resources of heaven are at our disposal. Secondly, remember what God has already done for us. He loved us, He sent His only Son to die in our place, He ‘bought us back’ out of death, He encouraged us, He gives us hope in what is yet to come. The bottom line is: Either God is enough, or He is not. Because Jesus ‘plus anything’ is nothing, because such is tainted and weak.

Note that our “establishment” ...our “standing fast,” is not just for defense. The goal in this Christian walk is not just survival! God is bigger and stronger than that! It’s not even a contest. Paul...and God Himself, wants us to

be established for “every good work.” This is a war we are in! It requires a serious spirit, and an unwavering commitment and determination to “finish well.”

How do we do this? How do we ‘stand fast?’ Does ‘stand fast’ mean to ‘stand around doing nothing?’ 1 Corinthians 15:58 tells us: *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, **always abounding in the work of the Lord**, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

One of the best ways to “stand fast” is to actually “keep moving.” They say a “good defense is a good offense!” We can hole up somewhere and wait the whole mess out, or we can believe Paul and Christ Himself, and get up and fight. The question is, do you believe Him? How do you want to finish?

3:1

It is generally accepted that this letter, as well as Paul’s connection to the church in Thessalonica, was early in his ministry. Maybe 51 or 52 AD. God was blessing Paul early in his ministry here by giving him an interaction with an encouraging and supportive church. We know that things would be very different later in his ministry. He would interact with some churches that were less than encouraging and far from supportive!

Certainly things seem to be much the same today. When called to ministry, the challenges become increasingly intense and formidable as life and time march on. It’s always good to be secure in the best before you have to deal with the worst! Throughout these letters...1 and 2 Thessalonians, there was no scolding, no real discipline being meted out on the believers, no rejection of doctrine or purity on their part. It was lovingly instructional. It was a truly blessed fatherly relationship.

As Paul begins to move toward the completion of this letter, he asks the believers that they pray for him and for those who were working with him. Notice what Paul specifically seeks prayer for: the word to go forth unhindered and that it would glorify God. Paul wanted their prayers, and thus ultimately the blessing and power of God, upon his preaching and teaching more than any upon any other area of ministry.

This is a significant fact because it is a common thing to become “distracted” if you will, by all the ‘peripherals’ of ministry and the church. We can forget that primarily what we are to be doing here is preaching the gospel, and furthering the kingdom of God and bringing glory to Him by such.

It’s not about programs, or coffeehouses, and radio stations. All of these things are simply to be designed to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. That should be our prayer! Like with Paul and the Thessalonians, may all that we do here cause the Word of God to ‘move swiftly forward’ and God ...and His Word, to be glorified by it all!

Too often we can minister with far too great a focus upon the plans of men and the charisma of church leaders. Methods and personalities can never do what God can do and will do when we go to Him. The focus for Paul here was upon the message not the messenger!

Paul was a giant of men. Profoundly used by God in the advancement of the kingdom. But he was humble enough, and wise enough, to go to his brethren to join him in the battle...even if that meant ‘only’ prayer, for Paul knew that’s where the battle really was won or lost anyway.

We can be faithful to serve...consistent in our giving, but still be slow to pray and eventually lose the battle because we tried to arrogantly do it all under our own strength. Many of you are so faithful in your prayers for

me and this community. I have no doubt that such is the reason why we have not only survived, but we have thrived!

It wasn't that Paul was callous as to his well-being, it was naturally an issue. For He couldn't preach if he was dead! It was just that unless the gospel was going forth, then he would rather be dead, because to preach the gospel was his very life! The fact is, we are so often blown about in the winds of this world, and faithfulness and loyalty are rare traits today!

3:2-3

Paul wants to move ahead with the message, but he knows that such can be hindered by evil people who constantly move to push him off course. They are still out there today, and they are just as 'unreasonable and wicked' as ever! And since Satan and those that are his cannot change or stop the message, then the next best thing is to go after the messengers!

The efforts of Satan and those that are his, come from so many different places and in so many different forms that it is humanly impossible to stop all of them. Paul knew this. That's why he prayed this way and sought others to pray the same. Often the worst delays, distractions and outright hindrances come not from the overt enemies of God. They come rather from those who wear the cloak of religion and yet still practice hatred, evil, and division, claiming impunity or special license to do so.

Paul doesn't get into specifics as to just how God ought to do this. He doesn't seek to win a debate with them, or desire to strike fear in them. He doesn't ask God to kill them either! He simply desires to preach the gospel as 'unhindered' as possible. Sort of a "God...can you keep these guys out of my way so we can preach your Word out there?"

Verse 3 tells us what we should already know but need to be reminded of repeatedly. And that is that "God is faithful." The answer to these "unreasonable and wicked men" is not to do battle with them, but to seek for God to do battle with them. HE will establish us....HE will guard us.

The word "establish" means to fix, make fast, set, confirm, establish, strengthen. The answer is not **effort** on our part, but **our trust in Him** to do His part! Such is not a matter of just to "man up" and knuckle down. It is a matter of growing in our trust of Him!

In John 17:14 Jesus went so far as to say that these folks will hate you! There will be those out there that will make every attempt to keep you out of the game. And when your focus is too much on them instead of God, they can be quite successful in doing such. PEOPLE will be unfaithful. YOU will be unfaithful! But God will not be. DO you trust Him in this matter?

3:4

Continuing in this concept of God being faithful, Paul goes on to say that he is confident that they will be faithful and obedient to what he is telling them and teaching them. Not just because he believes in them, but because he believes in God. His confidence was "in the Lord" not in men. *"It is better to trust in the Lord...than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord ...than to put confidence in princes"* (Psalm 118:8-9).

And of course, you don't have to be a Christian for long before you figure out why this is! Sometimes those we love the most will let us down. Your family, your best friends, those who claim Christianity will let you down. God will never let us down. God's faithfulness is something we have to get our hands around if we are to walk consistently and faithfully in our maturing journey!

God *will not*, He *cannot*, go back on His Word no matter how unfaithful we might be to Him. He cannot change His character. That is why we can place our trust in Him. That's why we often get ourselves in trouble when we claim God has instructed us in one direction, but He then changed His mind to send us in another! Plenty of folks have claimed this and then get upset when their brothers and sisters don't support them in their new pursuit!

Paul pounds home this idea of trusting God throughout his writings...1 Corinthians 1:9, 10:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, 2 Tim 2:13, etc. Paul knows what I know; without a very real trust that God has got your back, you will never grow or spiritually amount to much of anything.

3:5

This is what we are to aim for. This is where we have to go. It is not a matter of self-effort or futile attempts to "be strong." It all comes down to just how much we love God. When you are in love...really in love...things happen, things change. There is no way around it! It is a super-natural progression! The more in love we are with our spouse, the more we trust them. They more we trust them, the more in love with them we become.

Paul desired that their hearts be directed toward this love of God more than anything else. When we are, we trust God and trust therefore in what He is asking us, where He is directing us. But we instead so often take matters into our own hands and then we find ourselves in some weird and lonely places and situations. The word "patience" here literally means "endurance." If we fail to wait upon the Lord, we are going to get out ahead of Him and again find ourselves where we are not supposed to be.