

Series on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul  
2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, 16-17

Sermon #7  
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## A VERY SPECIAL THANKSGIVING

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Please open your Bibles to the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians. We have been taking up the prayers of the Apostle Paul chronologically. We have gone through 1 Thessalonians, and now we are in the middle of 2 Thessalonians.

We have learned one important lesson as we have been studying these prayers. It is that in prayer the Apostle Paul spent a great deal of time praising the Lord. That is evident in 1 Thessalonians, and it is evident also in 2 Thessalonians. I will not take the time to mention the verses, but you can see them by reading through these short epistles.

It is interesting, in speaking of Paul's prayers, that were offered for the Thessalonians, that he said again and again, "we." My text this morning is the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of the second chapter. You will notice that he began that way: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you . . ." The "we" in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians included Silas, translated Sylvanus, and Timothy, translated Timotheus. So these three men were partners in prayer. They shared the same burdens. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he felt liberty in his heart to say "we" are praying for you, "we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you." This undoubtedly means that any person who worked with the Apostle Paul soon learned to follow his example in prayer.

In looking at this prayer in verses 13 and 14, and if time permits, I want to relate it in closing to the prayer that you find at the end of the chapter in verses 16 and 17. We see that Paul again was giving thanks to the Lord for the blessings that He had brought into the lives of the Thessalonian people who had come to know the Savior.

Before we look at the prayer, I want us to look at the context, the verses that lead up to verses 13 and 14. Evidently somebody had written to the church at Thessalonica and may have forged the Apostle Paul's name to the letter. Notice in verse 2, toward the end of the verse, that he mentioned a letter, "as from us." The content of this letter was to the effect that they were already in the day of the Lord. Our King James translation says, "The day of Christ," but I think the day of the Lord has probably more support from those who have studied the Greek text. Then Paul said in verse 3, "Let no man deceive you by any means." There were certain things that were going to happen before the day of the Lord would begin. There would be a falling away and the man of sin would be revealed "whom the Lord . . . shall destroy him with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). However before the Lord comes, the judgment of God will come upon many people according to verses 11 and 12 where Paul wrote:

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (or, believe the lie):

12 That they all might be damned (all might be judged) who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:11-12).

These are most solemn words: "God shall send them strong delusion." They will have rejected the truth and so God will judge them so that they will believe *the* lie instead of believing the truth. The lie is that the man of sin, the Antichrist, is the Christ.

Now look with me at the prayer which begins in verse thirteen.

### I. THE REASON FOR PAUL'S THANKSGIVING TO GOD (2 Thess. 2:13).

It is clear that the Apostle Paul felt a deep obligation in his heart to thank God for what He had done in the salvation of the Thessalonian believers. He said at the beginning of this verse, "We are bound . . ." If you look back to chapter 1 verse 3, you will find the same words: "We are bound . . ." This means that he knew that God was the One who had raised up a church in Thessalonica, and so he felt in his heart obligated to thank God for what He had done. The word "bound" means that he was indebted to God to praise Him. And his feeling of indebtedness was not just to thank the Lord once, but to thank Him "always," or *always*, as we would say today. He was going to continue to thank God. He felt that he could never thank God sufficiently so that he could check this off of his prayer list and forget all about it. He always was going to be grateful to God for the work that God had done.

It is true that God had used him to preach the Gospel. But when he thought of the work that had taken place in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians, it was as though he had nothing to do with it. It was a work that God had done. And his heart was just overwhelmed with praise and thanksgiving to God as he thought about the believers in Thessalonica.

But looking deeper into his thanksgiving to God, how did he express it in his prayer? Notice what he wrote in the middle of verse 13: "Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation."

I have mentioned to you before that I have noticed in people's conversation when something good happens to them (and I am talking in general about people in the world), they will say that they are thankful for whatever it was. But you will notice in Scripture that thanksgiving always has God as its object. Paul was not just thankful; he was thankful to God. But when many people say that they are thankful for something, it is more of an expression that they feel lucky about something, or that they are glad that things did not go in another direction. But there is not any recognition that God might be responsible for the good things that they were experiencing. Paul was not like that. The other writers of Scripture were not like that. They are thankful *to God*. Here Paul was ascribing all the glory to God for the work that had been done in the hearts of those Thessalonian believers. God had made the lives of the believers different, very different. Neither he, nor Silas, nor Timothy, could thank God enough for all that He had done. So they were inclined to thank Him always, to give the glory to God.

Yesterday at Oscar Burn's service, I mentioned something that Rose and the family had shared with me. Oscar did not know the Lord as a child, but when he was 16 or 17 years of age, he got concerned about his relationship with God. He talked to several people. I do not know who they were, but he could not get the answer that he needed. Providentially, and I say providentially because this is something that only the Lord

could do, Oscar started reading the Bible to find out how to get right with God. He read all night, but he finally found the answer that he was looking for. You don't find many teenagers, or people at any age doing that, do you? As a result, he trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Do we glorify Oscar because he was saved? Well, Oscar would be the first to object if we did. God is the One Who saved him. And what God did in Oscar's heart that night, or early morning, was the result of what God chose to do before the world was created.

I know people have trouble with the doctrine of election, but I want you to see from this passage of Scripture that Paul, without any hesitation, attributed the work that was taking place there in the first century in the lives of heathen people in the city of Thessalonica, was what God determined to do before the foundation of the world.

We may have trouble believing that, but this is the teaching of Scripture. When you see Paul's response to this, where he recognized the hand of God fulfilling His eternal purposes, his heart was overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to God for the work that God had done in the hearts of those people. He told the Thessalonian Christians that "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation."

I think that the reason the doctrine of election troubles us is because we have a low view of God. We have an omniscient God Who knows the end from the beginning. We have an omnipotent God Who is perfectly capable of doing anything that He sets out to do. He is infinitely wise in all that He does. So when you see this, you can rejoice and thank God that He could look down through time, right to the very end, and in His sovereign grace, year after year, save those whom He had chosen to save.

Charles Simeon, whose name you might not be familiar with, was a minister in the Church of England back in the 1700's. The roots of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship are traceable to him. He for many years was the pastor of the college church on the campus of Cambridge University. Because in his preaching he was faithful to the Word of God, many of the people who didn't like the truth, locked their pews (because they rented pews in those days) so that the students couldn't use them when they came to hear Simeon preach. But all around the front, down the aisles, across the back were students standing who came to hear Charles Simeon as he preached the Gospel of the grace of God. On one occasion Simeon said this about the doctrine of election:

It is true that nothing but deep humility of mind can ever lead a man so to acquiesce in it (that is, the doctrine of election) as to approve of it with his soul and to adorn it in his life. Where that humility exists as it did in the Apostle Paul, the doctrine will be most grateful to the soul and will form a ground of the most unfeigned praise to Almighty God (*Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 18, p. 390).

This is exactly what you see in the life of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul wrote of this great doctrine of election again in his Ephesian epistle where we read,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:3-6).

You see, this is one of the first evidences that we understand the doctrine of election, when our hearts are filled with praise to God because He has saved us. Just think of what this means. God not only had us in mind before the world was created, but He chose us for salvation. God is God! He can do what He wills to do. And would any of us question that God has the right to do whatever He was determined to do regarding salvation? Everyone who has ever believed in Christ, or who will ever believe in Christ in the future, was chosen by God Himself for salvation. When you think of us, mere human beings, don't you feel like David did when he wrote Psalm 8? "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psa. 8:4). God doesn't owe us, or any other human being, anything. But in His infinite grace, and because of His great love for us, He chose us to be His forever! That is amazing truth, and it ought to make worshipers out of all of us.

That has to do with eternity past. Let us look next into verse 14 where Paul spoke of eternity to come. And so here we are concerned about:

## II. THE GOAL OF OUR SALVATION (2 Thess. 2:14).

Let's look next at the end of verse 14 where he mentioned eternity to come. I am referring to the words, "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the goal of our salvation, the ultimate purpose of God in our salvation is that we would obtain "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

These two verses, 13 and 14, span all of time, from what took place in eternity past to what is going to take place either when the Lord's work in our salvation is finally completed. The goal of our salvation is that we are going to share the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul did not say, although he could have said this, that God has chosen us so that we would be in heaven. He did not say that. That is where we are going to be, but that is not his emphasis here in this text. It is surely a part of our salvation. But God is not just concerned about *where* we are going to be; God is concerned about *what* we are going to be. We are saved now, but we are going to have salvation in its fullness someday when we share the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Apostle John wrote, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Paul expressed it in these words in Romans 8:29, that we are predestined "to be conformed to the image of His Son," our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a couple of questions just to get you thinking a little bit. If you were planning salvation, would you have ever thought of such a goal, such a purpose for the people that you were saving? And if you had thought of it, would you have attempted to do it? And yet this God's object in saving us, to make us like His Son! It would almost sound blasphemous, wouldn't it, if it were to come from us? It not only goes beyond anything that you and I could possibly deserve, but beyond anything that we could possibly achieve. Yet this is the purpose of God in our salvation.

This was Paul's way of saying that someday you and I are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would obtain "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." He did not mean that we will eventually become Deity. There will always be a difference between us and the Lord. But the Word says that "we shall be like Him." This is the ultimate purpose of God in our salvation. That change began the very moment we were saved, and God has been changing us ever since. What right do we have to believe that we have been chosen by

God for such a purpose? The only way we know is because it is in the Word of God. I repeat: "we shall be like Him," the Apostle John says, "for we shall see Him as He is."

So, on the basis of what we have in this prayer, let me define salvation for you. Salvation is a work of God whereby He chooses defiled, guilty, helpless, worthless sinners, and through Christ saves them with the purpose that eventually He would make them like Christ. It began with our election in eternity past and it is going to be completed when the Lord comes again. There you have the beginning and the ending of our salvation.

Now, when we look at ourselves today, we all have to confess, don't we, that there is probably more about us that is *not like* the Lord Jesus than there is *like* Him. We all have to recognize, don't we, that God still has a lot of work to do in us before we will be like the Lord Jesus Christ, a lot of work. When in Romans 8:28 we read that God works "all things together for good," the good that that passage talks about is out being conformed to the image of Christ. So God takes all of the circumstances and experiences of our lives – our knowledge of the Word, our obedience to the Word, our trials, even our failures and our sins – He takes all of our experiences, all of the events that touch our lives, and He uses them to make us more like our Savior. He is working continually in us to make us like the Lord Jesus.

But now let us notice from our text:

### **III. THE MEANS GOD EMPLOYS TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WORK (2 Thess. 2:13b-14a).**

I want you to note that here in this prayer Paul mentioned the means that God uses to obtain the result that He has in mind for every single one of us. There are three of them. Let me read them to you. They are found in the latter part of verse 13 and the first part of verse 14. Listen to what Paul wrote:

. . . God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel . . ."

Notice from this statement that Paul was indicating that the Thessalonians did not initiate their own salvation. We have no record at all that anybody in Thessalonica asked Paul and Silas and Timothy to come there to preach the Gospel. They did not have that much knowledge to know that that was what they needed. God sent Paul there and Paul preached the Gospel. They were not the ones who took a step toward God and then God met them, but God was the One Who took the first step toward them. It is always that way.

There is a hymn that is in our hymnal which we often sing which tells us exactly how the Lord moves upon our hearts as He prepares to save us. Let me repeat for you the words of the first stanza. I love to go over those words which declare the truth about every one of us.

I sought the Lord, and afterwards I knew  
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;  
It was not I that found, O Savior true;  
No, I was found of thee.

Now I have said that in this prayer of the Apostle Paul, he mentioned three means that God uses to bring about our salvation. By this I have in mind three means *in addition to* His choice of us in eternity past.

#### **A. Called of God (2 Thess. 2:14a).**

The first is that He calls us. But the question is, How does He call us? He calls us by the Gospel. It is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. That is why we preach the Gospel. Election does not eliminate the necessity for preaching the Gospel. It does not eliminate the necessity for beseeching people to be reconciled to God. Election includes the preaching of the Gospel.

When Oscar Burns stayed up all night reading the Bible, what was he looking for? He may not have known it then, but he was looking for the Gospel. Why was he looking? Because God at that time was in the process of calling Oscar Burns as a teenager to Himself.

We all may have heard the Gospel under different circumstances, but it is always God calling us, calling us by the Gospel. That is why I have said so often that nobody is ever saved apart from the Word of God. Of course there are many people who hear the Gospel, but it never phases them. I am speaking now about the effect that the preaching of the Gospel has upon the elect when God is preparing to save them. Even the elect may not respond the first time they hear the Gospel, but eventually they will hear, believe, and be saved.

When God is calling us to salvation, we hear the Gospel, the story of how Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, that He rose triumphantly from the grave. It is through this message, through His work on the Cross that He has put away our sins. As we hear this message, it is God Who gives us the faith to believe it and to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Let me add this. As we get acquainted with our Bibles, we learn that if we want to see other people saved, we need to give them the Gospel – not jokes, not entertainment, not manipulation. It is the Gospel that the Lord uses to call people to Himself. If you are in a position like Oscar was where he could not, apparently, get it from anybody, the Lord drew His heart to the Word of God, and in the Scriptures he found out the truth that he needed to know. We need to tell people that Jesus Christ died in order to save sinners from their sins. They may not like the word "sin," and may not like to talk about sins, but the Gospel talks about sin. We give people the Gospel, and then we trust the Lord to use His Word for the accomplishment of His own purposes. That is how we were saved. The Gospel may have come to us in different ways, but that is how we were saved. He has called us to Himself by the Gospel.

### **B. Sanctification of the Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13b).**

There is a second means mentioned here in our text. The divine call gets us saved, but that is not all that there is to salvation. He spoke in verse 13 about the "sanctification of the Spirit." Here is another wonderful part of salvation that we did not ask for. Probably not many of us knew anything about this when we were saved. But when we were saved God gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. He came to abide in us. He is not just sharing Himself with all of us so that we all have a little of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit dwells in me just like He did not dwell any place else. He dwells in you just like He did not dwell in any place else. His purpose in coming to us is to sanctify us. This means that He is going to make us a holy people. We know from the Scriptures that we are never going to be perfectly holy until we finally see the Lord, but this is a work that the Holy Spirit has been doing in us since the moment we were saved.

A major part of this great work of salvation is that, immediately after we trust in Christ, the Spirit of God began this work of sanctification. This is His work, but we have responsibilities in this. When the Apostle Peter exhorted the Christians to whom he was writing to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord

and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), he was speaking of their sanctification. In the second chapter of 1 Peter, verse 2, Peter told them to “desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.” As we grow in the Lord, we are making progress in sanctification. “The sincere milk of the Word” is in the Bible. We need to read it. We need to be taught the truth of Scripture. And we need to obey it. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. The Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture, and He has been given to us as our Teacher to guide us in understanding and obeying the truth. So daily Bible reading and prayer, to understand what we read in the Word, are the means that the Lord uses in our sanctification. As we experience the trials and testings of life, these are designed by the Holy Spirit to enable us to grow through obedience to the Word of God. Even the apostles needed to learn that the Holy Spirit was going to be not, only working through them, but working in them, making them like the Lord Jesus.

There is one verse which really sums it up. It is 2 Corinthians 3:18, where Paul wrote,

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass (he speaks of the Word of God as a mirror) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

As we read our Bibles, as we come to church to hear the Word of God taught, as we read good books which help us to understand the Bible, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and lives day by day. The process may be so slow that you do not detect what is going on in your own heart. But, if you could see what you are today and see what you would have been if you had never come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, there would be no doubt in your mind but that God has done, and continues to do, an amazing work in your heart. It is called the “Sanctification of the Spirit.”

### **C. Belief of the Truth (2 Thess. 2:14b).**

The last thing that Paul mentioned as the means of our sanctification is "belief of the truth." Belief means faith, doesn't it, and “the truth” speaks of the Scriptures. This means that the Christian life is a life in which we are learning more and more every day from the Word of God as to what it means to trust God. This is a vital part of our sanctification. We believe the doctrines, the teachings of Scripture. We may not be able to explain much that is in the Bible, but whatever is in the Book, we believe. We rejoice in God’s Word. We believe His promises, and by faith in the truth we seek to live day by day in obedience to the Word of God. So Paul was indicating here that there can be no real holiness of life apart from faith and obedience in the truth of the Word of God. We were saved by faith, and we live by faith, faith in God and in His Word. Trusting the Lord for our salvation, is only the beginning of trusting Him. Day by day throughout our lives we are continuing to learn to trust the Lord to meet our needs, and to guide us in His ways. As we trust the Lord, we will also be growing in our understanding of the truth, and I am speaking about the truth in God’s Word. When the Lord was praying for His own, which is what we are, His prayer to the Father was, “Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17).

### **III. AN APPROPRIATE REQUEST (2 Thess. 2:16-17).**

Before I close I want to contrast, very briefly, this prayer in verses 13 and 14 which we have been considering, with the prayer that follows in verses 16 and 17 here in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. Paul’s prayer in verses 13 and 14 is praise, or thanksgiving to God that He had saved those to whom he, Paul, was writing in Thessalonica. When we get down to verses 16 and 17, this is a prayer of intercession. This is what he prayed for those people in Thessalonica who had experienced the saving grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work (2 Thess. 2:16-17).

The word "comfort" always means two things. If you are going to comfort somebody, it means that you are going to encourage them, but it also means that by your encouragement you are going to strengthen them. That is, God is going to use comfort in that way. So he is saying that, in the light of all that God has done for them, he said that he was praying that day by day they would be encouraged to persevere in the very things that God would use for the accomplishment of His purposes in their lives. He meant, to persevere in prayer, to persevere in the Word, and to persevere in their obedience to the Word. When he said, "That he would stablish you in every good word and work," the word "stablish," or establish, as we would spell it today, contains the idea of *getting us set in the right direction and then keeping our lives on course*.

It may be that some of us here today have grown cold toward the Lord. Perhaps we have not been as faithful in reading the Word as we used to be. Maybe we haven't been trusting the Lord as we need to trust Him. These are probably some of the reasons why Paul was praying like he was for those believers in Thessalonica. They had made a tremendous start. God had done a wonderful work in their hearts. He was rejoicing to see what God had done. But "now," he said, in the light of all that God has done, and in the light of all that God had done, and all that He intended to do, we are praying God would "comforted your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work." God is the only One Who can do this.

### **Conclusion**

This is a prayer that I hope you will pray for me. This is a prayer that I want to pray for you. The Spirit of God led Paul to put it here so that we would know that this is what we need. We can all get discouraged along the way. We can be tripped up by sin. A lot of things can hinder us. We need the strengthening of the Lord. We need the encouragement that God gives to get our lives on track, and to keep us there. We are bound for heaven. We have been saved to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, by the grace of God let's not have anything to do with those influences in our lives that are going to detract us from that purpose. Although it seems impossible to us, it is God's will to so work in our hearts that we will be more like the Lord Jesus Christ today than we were yesterday, and more like Him tomorrow than we are today.