

2:1-17 Correction for Misunderstanding the Parousia, part 3

This is our third week considering this great text that tells us much about eschatology, the biblical doctrine of last things.

Thus far we've seen that...

- I. The Parousia should not cause anxieties. (2:1–2) There is no need to be “shaken in mind” or “troubled” about these things. The Day of the Lord has not yet come and it is not “at hand.”

We know that because...

- II. The Parousia will be preceded by apostasy. (2:3–12) There will be a great falling away and the man of sin/son of perdition (Antichrist) will be revealed. God will send unbelievers a strong delusion so that they believe the lies of the Antichrist. Christ will destroy that Antichrist with his word when he returns in glory. Clearly, none of that has happened yet; it's all in the future.

With all of that in mind, we can move on to the third main point of this passage:

- III. The Parousia should produce steadfastness (2:13–17)

This section contains some very profound theological truths, some of which are difficult to understand, some of which are controversial. However, as we consider the details of this passage, we'll find that the teaching here is quite clear; the main argument is fairly easy to grasp. Some people do not like the implications of Paul's teaching here, but that's a different matter. We simply cannot deny the truths that Paul is teaching us here.

Our responsibility is to accept and try to understand what the Bible says. We do not dismiss what the Bible teaches even if we do not understand it.

.15—“stand fast and hold the traditions...” Paul is urging us here to be steadfast in two areas: salvation and apostolic traditions. We'll look at the first one of these today and the second one next week, DV.

- A. .13-14 Be steadfast in salvation.

1. Thank God for your salvation. Cf. 1:3.

- a) “but...” – In contrast with the unsaved who reject the Gospel and face God's judgment (vs. 12), the believers in Thessalonica had accepted the Gospel.

- b) Paul was confident that the Thessalonians were genuinely saved, and he's thankful for that. They are "brethren," i.e., spiritual brothers/siblings, and Paul is thankful that these people converted to Christ under his preaching.
- c) Note the descriptive phrase "beloved of the Lord." Those who are saved can be assured that God loves them. What he's about to mention is an evidence that God loved these people.

They are beloved of the Lord and thus, chosen.

- 2. .13 Recognize that salvation ultimately is the result of God's choice.

The Thessalonian believers had responded to God's call by loving the truth. Paul sees that as evidence of God's choosing them, and that shows that God loves them.

The emphasis in vss. 13-14 is on God's action in salvation. Paul is describing what goes on in the mind of God long before anyone responds to the Gospel. God's ways and thoughts are far above ours, so we must proceed carefully here.

Paul is not denying human responsibility; he's merely focusing on what God does in the process. Because God loved them, he chose them.

- a) .13b God's choice is election. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation."

1 Thessalonians 1:4 *knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.*

- b) This is one of the most profound statements in the book pertaining to salvation. It's also a rather controversial statement. Some people have a hard time dealing with the implications of the doctrine of election. I recognize that it's a sensitive issue. But we have to take these words as we find them and not deny what they obviously say.
- c) This is a very strong statement of God's electing love. Salvation begins with *God's* action, not man's. The action in view here is election—God's choice of individuals for salvation.

- (1) .13 The primary assertion here is “God hath chosen you to/for salvation.” (εἴλετο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός) In the original word order, the verb comes first: “chosen you” are the first words in this phrase.

The grammar here (middle) suggest “chosen for himself.” So this is God’s sovereign choice. God makes this choice for himself, for his own purposes, for his own reasons. I.e., not based on what we do.

- (2) “chosen” (εἴλετο) means “to take for oneself; to choose; to elect to office.”
- (3) And this is a past tense verb (aorist)—“God chose...” The construction implies that this happened at some definite point in the past.
- (4) The object of the choosing is “you” (plural).

Election pertains to people, not merely to a plan. Election is not merely God’s plan of salvation. Election is God’s choice of particular people.

What is the basis for this choice? “beloved of the Lord.” (vs. 13b) God’s love is the reason for this choice. God sovereignly set his love on these people.

Doesn’t God love everyone? Yes—John 3:16. However, God’s love for his own chosen people is different from God’s love for all humanity.

We all recognize different kinds of love.

Illus.: I might say “I love fishing” and “I love my wife,” but I better not be using the word “love” in the same sense. My love for fishing is not the same as my love for my wife. Likewise, God’s love for the unsaved world is not the same as God’s love for his elect.

If God loved everyone *in this same sense*, then everyone would be elect and everyone would be saved. Many people will not be saved, and the responsibility for their failure to be saved rests entirely with themselves—vs. 12.

Those people are *not* damned because they are not of the elect. They are damned because they refused to love the truth; they chose unrighteousness. They are responsible for their failure to choose Christ. They are damned because of their sin, particularly, unbelief.

But for *believers*, Paul puts ultimate responsibility on God—he loved them and chose them for salvation. These chosen people then responded by repenting of sin and trusting in Christ.

- (5) .13b “chosen you *to* salvation” This preposition (εἰς) often indicates purpose—God has chosen you for/into the purpose of salvation. And God’s purposes will be fulfilled; God’s purposes will come to pass.
- (6) The outcome of this choice is “salvation” (σωτηρία). God’s choice results in salvation.

John 10:27-28 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

So the obvious implication is that God’s choice is effective. Those whom God loves and chooses will be saved.

Some people do not appreciate this doctrine. They don’t like the idea that God’s choice is ultimate. But whatever one’s reservations might be, we cannot deny the central truth—God chose believers for salvation. Election is a biblical doctrine.

- (7) .13b He qualifies that statement in three ways; we should understand three things about this choice:

- (a) This choice happened “from the beginning.”
(ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς)

The beginning of what?

- (i) Perhaps from the beginning of time or creation. Paul tells us elsewhere that God made this choice before creation.

Eph 1:4-5 ... he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, ... Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

- (ii) Or maybe the beginning in view here is that of Paul’s missionary work. The Thessalonian believers came to Christ through Paul’s preaching, and they’ve been faithful believers from the beginning of his ministry.

Philippians 4:15 ... in the beginning of the gospel, ...

I.e., the beginning of his preaching ministry in Thessalonica. God’s choice of these believers became evident through Paul’s ministry to them.

- (iii) Both of these are true. God’s choice extends back to eternity past, but we get saved at some point in time under the preaching of some person.

- (b) This choice happened “through/by sanctification of the Spirit.” (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος)

- (i) Sanctification is the setting-apart of the believer from sin unto God.

- (ii) The HSp convicts us of sin and convinces us that the Gospel is true.

(iii) At the point of salvation, the believer is set apart spiritually and positionally as a child of God.

We are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. That sets us apart unto God. Our status/position is sanctified because we are in Christ.

(iv) Why do people get saved? In part, because of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

(c) This choice happened through “belief in the truth.” (καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας)

(i) So here we have the human response in the process of salvation. God loved them, chose them, and the Holy Spirit sanctified them, and the result is that they believed the Gospel.

(ii) The object of their belief was “the truth.” I.e., the truth of the Gospel. They believed a specific set of truth claims.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by thy truth. Thy word is truth.

(iii) The human responsibility in salvation is belief in Christ. Those who believe in Jesus demonstrate that they are elect, sanctified, and called.

God elects and calls; the HSp sanctifies or sets apart; believers preach the Gospel, and sinners respond by repenting of sin and trusting in Christ. Unbelievers “receive not the love of the truth” and continue under God’s wrath.

d) .14a God’s choice produced calling: He called you by our gospel. Salvation comes through the calling of the Gospel.

God chooses in eternity past and then calls at some point during one's life. God's call came to the Thessalonians when Paul preached the Gospel to them.

- (1) "Whereunto" is literally "into which" (εἰς ὃ). Through Paul's preaching, God called these people into everything he mentioned in vs. 13 – God's love, God's choice, the sanctification of the Spirit, and love of the truth. The Gospel calls people to all of this.

Quote: The God who chose them to be saved is the same God who made sure that the message of salvation reached them by means of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel.¹

That's the way it works; if God has chosen someone, he makes sure that that person hears the Gospel. No one is saved without access to the Gospel message. God calls through the Gospel.

- (2) This is what theologians often describe as the efficacious call. I.e., the effective call.

- (a) It's not just a general invitation that some people hear and deny. Most people who hear the Gospel deny it; they refuse it, reject it.

How many people heard Jesus call, (Mt 11:28-30) *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...*

Mt 22:14 *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

- (b) Paul is talking about an *effective* call; it results in salvation every time. Those who hear this call respond in faith. Cf. John 10:28

¹ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 327.

If everyone were called in this sense, everyone would be saved. But this is not a universal call; it is personal and particular. God calls some.

- (3) The call comes “by our gospel.” (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν) Cf. Rom 10:17 faith comes by hearing

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Christ. Cf. 1 Cor 15:1-3. Paul proclaimed this message and the Thessalonians believed it.

God uses the preaching of the Gospel to call his people to salvation. The Gospel is an invitation to be saved. So this is another part of the human element; people have to hear the message of the Gospel in order to be saved. Cf. Rom 1:16

“How shall they hear without a preacher?” The call comes through the proclaimed word of God.

All of this implies human responsibility. God elects and calls, but believers still have to preach the Gospel, and sinners have to “obey the gospel.” The call goes out through proclaiming the Gospel, and sinners are responsible to hear and to obey the Gospel. They are able to respond because of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

God’s part is election, sanctification, and calling; our part is proclaiming the Gospel; the sinner’s part is believing the message. And the Holy Spirit has to make all of this effective. It’s all of grace; we cannot take any credit; we do not earn any of it; it’s all a gift.

When this divine message is empowered by the Spirit, ...

- (4) .14b The call results in “the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- (a) So the result of the call is salvation. That’s how we know that this is the efficacious call—it results in “obtaining the glory of our Lord.”

- (b) “obtaining” (περιποίησις) – gaining or acquiring something permanently; acquiring a share in something.

Same word in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to **obtain** (περιποίησις) salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

This calling was for a purpose (εἰς) ...

- (c) And what is gained/acquired here is the “glory of our Lord...”
 - (i) Salvation gives us a share in the glory of our Lord. We receive a share of God’s glory upon conversion, and we’ll receive glorified bodies and spend eternity in glory in the future.
 - (ii) Salvation through Christ is a glorious prospect.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 ... *walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

- (d) And given the context of the 2nd Coming of Christ in glory, a further implication is that believers alive at the time of the Parousia will experience the glory of Christ when he comes in power and majesty. Cf. 1:7-10.

Philippians 3:21 *[The Lord] will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, ...*

1Pe 5:10 *But the God of all grace, ... hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, ...*

- (e) What is the result of being chosen, sanctified, and called? You obtain salvation.

If the beginning of this process starts, then the end result is guaranteed. You cannot be elected, sanctified, and called without also being justified and glorified.

Romans 8:29–30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, ... Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

This is the “Golden Chain” of salvation. Election, predestination, and calling are God’s work; we don’t have any control over that; it’s his business; it happens according to God’s purposes and plans.

Our responsibility is to proclaim that message so that the unsaved can respond to the call in repentance and faith. Those who respond that way show that they were elected, sanctified, and called. Those who don’t respond that way demonstrate that they had no love of the truth and had pleasure in unrighteousness.

These concepts are deeply profound. We are plumbing the depths of theology today. This is about as deep as it gets with theology, and it’s enough to boggle the mind. We do not claim to understand all the implications of these teachings, but we can and must affirm them.

We can join Paul (vs. 13) in thanking God for his love, his sovereign choice, the work of the Holy Spirit, the truth of the Gospel, and salvation by faith.

I trust that this has been your experience. If not, I urge you to respond to God’s call by repenting of sin and trusting in Christ to be saved. If you do not want vs. 12, then you must act on vs. 13—believe the truth.

By faith, we obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s meditate on that great truth as we finish today.