

Chosen to Salvation

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon emphasizes God's sovereign choice in salvation and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives.

Scripture: John 16:7, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 1:8, Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 4:30, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 1 John 4:10

Topics: "Election And Salvation", "Holy Spirit Sanctification"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, emphasizing the profound doctrine of God's choice in our salvation, based on His love and divine determination. The Thessalonians are reminded that God's love preceded their love for Him, and they were chosen not because of their merit, but because of God's love. The process of sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth is explained, highlighting the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the righteousness and victory over Satan brought by Christ. Paul encourages the Thessalonians to stand firm in their faith, holding fast to the teachings they have received, and prays for their comfort, establishment, and perseverance in good works.

Transcript

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Chosen from the Beginning

Having laid before the Thessalonians the wonderful hope of the coming of the Lord, Paul now takes up the immediate task of living for God. While waiting for Christ to come for His church, there is a task to perform, a life to live, a testimony to give. These things should be our present concern.

In verse 13, thanks is given to the Lord for having chosen these Thessalonian Christians: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The revelation that is stated here so simply is one of the most profound doctrines of the whole Word of God. In fact, it is more difficult than the subject of the coming of the Lord. Our salvation did not originate in human choice. God willed our salvation long before we ever came into existence. This divine choice was based upon divine love and divine determination. Paul gives thanks because they were "brethren beloved of the Lord."

One of the great truths of Scripture is that before we ever had sense enough to love the Lord the Lord loved us. This is stated in the very familiar text, "For God so loved the world." Some would like to make these words read "God so loved the elect." God does love the elect, but that is not what the text says. God loved the world. He loved the unsaved. He loved them all. That is why He gave His Son. The love of God is mentioned often in Scripture. In 1 John 4:10, it is written: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Likewise, out of His heart of love there was a divine decision in eternity past which is referred to here as our being chosen. The original act in our salvation was with God, not with man. When God chose us to salvation, He did not choose us because we were lovely. He did not choose us because He saw something in us that He did not see in others. But He chose us because He loved us.

There is a mystery connected with this revelation that none can ever completely fathom. Why did God choose us? We never will completely understand it, but the glorious fact is that He did. In Ephesians 1:4, this choice is described: "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." The precious truth is that God chose us. This is the occasion of the thanksgiving in verse 13.

The testimony of the Thessalonians showed clearly that they were the chosen ones of God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4 Paul had written earlier, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." So here again the believers at Thessalonica are reminded of God's grace in their election and salvation.

Sanctification of the Spirit

The process by which God chose these Christians at Thessalonica from the beginning, and how they are brought unto salvation is revealed in the next phrase, "Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." What does "sanctification of the Spirit" mean? The simplest definition of true sanctification is that it means to set apart as holy to God. How has God sanctified those who once were bound for eternal punishment, once were without God, without hope, and under the wrath of God? How is it possible to take such a one and make that one sanctified by the Spirit?

Christ spoke of this tremendous process in John 16. He was dealing with His disciples on the necessity for His going away. The disciples did not want Him to go away and He then told them: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:7-11). These verses, so significant in their revelation, teach that when a person is coming to Christ there must be a work of the Spirit in his heart before he can come. That is the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables a person lost in sin to understand the truth of the gospel. The ministry of the Spirit is not to convict of sins (plural). The purpose of the ministry of the Spirit is not to make us realize what awful sinners we are. That may be a part of the process, but that is not the point. What the Spirit desires to impress upon an unsaved person is the one fact that he is not saved because he has not believed. It is the sin of unbelief, defined in verse 9, "of sin, because they believe not on me." The Holy Spirit must bring a person to the place where it is realized that the one obstacle standing between a lost soul and eternal salvation is lack of faith in Christ. One is not lost because one has not trusted Christ. It all comes to the focal point of simply trusting in the Savior.

The passage explains further the ministry of the Spirit: "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father and ye see me no more" (John 16:10). While Christ was on earth He was the living embodiment of righteousness. As people studied His life and saw what He did, they beheld the righteousness of God in action. But Christ is not here to tell us about righteousness. Unsaved people must be instructed on the subject of unrighteousness by the Spirit of God. They must learn, of course, that God is righteous. But they need to know most of all that God is able to give righteousness, to justify those who are willing to trust in Christ. God bestows a justification, a righteousness which is by faith--the free gift of God, purchased for us by Christ on the cross. A person who trusts in Christ can receive this righteousness. It is the ministry of the Spirit to make this truth plain.

The passage in John 16 speaks also of the fact that "the prince of this world is judged." This is a description of the victory over Satan at the cross. Christ won the victory over Satan by His death, and Satan is judged now. Satan is defeated by the death of Christ and his doom is assured. Back of sanctification is the work of the Spirit in bringing a person to the place where he sees that he is saved by simply trusting in Jesus Christ.

When a person trusts in Christ, then the work of sanctification really begins. First, there is the work of regeneration. In John 3, where Christ talked to Nicodemus, He said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The person who once was lost and spiritually dead now becomes alive and receives a new nature in Christ. As such he is made fit to be set apart as holy to God.

Another phase of the sanctifying work of the Spirit is His ministry as He comes to indwell us. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul reminds the worldly Corinthians that if they are really saved their bodies are the temples of God: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). In other words, Paul is saying that every Christian is a sanctuary of God, that God has seen fit to take up His dwelling place in that person. This is a marvelous truth and a part of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Christians, they are sealed by the Spirit. His very presence is God's seal, God's token of ownership, God's token of security in Christ. In Ephesians 4:30, the exhortation is given: "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." The day of redemption is the day of resurrection of believers. It is the day when the bodies of believers will be redeemed. As far as our souls are concerned, we are redeemed right now, but our bodies are not yet redeemed. According to the Scriptures, the presence of the Spirit is God's token to us, the promise that we will be saved completely and transformed on that day of the redemption of our bodies.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, still another aspect of the sanctifying work of the Spirit is revealed. There it is stated: "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The very moment one is saved, the Spirit takes that person out of his position in Adam--in sin and under condemnation--and puts him in Christ, i.e., in the body of Christ, so that he is a living part of the organism we call the true church. That again is part of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In addition to all that God provides for the individual in Christ in salvation, is the possibility of being filled by the Spirit as we yield ourselves to Him. The Holy Spirit works in us the divine character that God has ordained, and the fruit of the Spirit--the love, and the joy, and the peace--become our portion. Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonian Christians is because God has chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit.

Belief of the Truth

The last part of verse 13 brings out another great truth: "Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." This verse has a very significant order. It begins with God and the process is carried through by the Holy Spirit. What was the part of the believer? It is stated simply, through "belief of the truth." On man's part, salvation and sanctification come because he is willing to trust in the Savior. This is a wonderful truth. It delivers the soul from legalism. It makes clear that it is impossible to build a ladder to heaven by some sort of good works, religion, or church ordinances. There is a proper place for works, but they are not the way of salvation. Works pertain to the Christian life and testimony, but salvation is something which God has to do for us.

It is to this glorious salvation that Paul tells us we are called: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14). They were called by the gospel, the means that God used to bring about the fulfillment of His choice, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and by their belief in the truth. We are reminded again how the Apostle Paul is jealous for the gospel. In Galatians he pronounces a curse upon anyone who does not preach the true gospel. He believed in putting the gospel first. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 he tells the Corinthians that when he came to them he declared unto them first of all the gospel which he defines: "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

One of the tragedies of Christianity in our modern day is that there is so little clear preaching of the gospel. What is the good news? What was the message that led these Thessalonian people to know Jesus Christ as Savior? The good news was that Christ the Son of God had come and that He had died on the cross for the sins of the whole world. The good news was that though He was buried, He was raised the third day from the grave in newness of life, in victory over the grave, in evidence that He was indeed the very Son of God. It was a demonstration of the power of God and of the deity of Christ's own person. It was evidence of the fact that when He died He really had accomplished that which only an infinite person could accomplish--our eternal and infinite redemption. This is the true gospel.

The Coming Glory

As Paul writes this letter, he thinks back to the time when he had told the believers at Thessalonica these truths, and how they believed them. Through believing the gospel, they had become gloriously and wonderfully saved. But Paul also takes a look at the future, "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14). The Thessalonian Christians were in great affliction. They were going through real persecution. As Paul lifts up their eyes beyond their circumstances, he is reminding them that they are bound for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures declare plainly that before God gets through with us everyone of us will be perfectly glorious. We are going to be trophies of the grace of God. Through eternity, the church will be singled out as the example of what the grace of God can do, by taking poor, hell-bound sinners and transforming them into holy saints of God, conformed to the image of Christ. That is the glory. There are many imperfections evident in believers now, but when God completes His work the church will be a perfect bride for the Lord Jesus. There is glory ahead.

Exhortation to Stand Fast

On the basis of these wonderful truths and tokens of what God has done, in verses 15-17 an exhortation is given which is summed up in the words "stand fast." There is a natural tendency in the Christian heart to backslide. Against this we must stand. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye

have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (v. 15). The word for "traditions" means that which is given alongside. Many commentaries have been written on the Scriptures. Men of God study the Bible and expound what it teaches. The commentaries are not inspired, and they are not infallible. Some expositors are very faithful in their exposition of the Scriptures, however, and it is certain that Paul was faithful as he expounded the truth of God. The teaching that accompanies the written Word, that which was given "alongside," should be held fast by Christians even though in others than the apostles their teachings are not infallible.

How we can thank God for faithful teachers and preachers of the Word! How much their teaching has contributed to the church! Paul says in reference to such teaching, "Hang on to it." The tendency in our day is always to be looking for something new and different. There is need to realize that truth is not new. H. A. Ironside used to say, "What is new is not true, and what is true is not new." In other words, it is the old truth that is true. We may find truths that as far as we are concerned are new. One can read the Bible and discover a new thought, only to find that others long ago had already seen the same truth. It was new truth to the individual even though it was old truth. Of course, we should endeavor to learn more of the Scriptures, but we should also hold fast the traditions, the things we have been taught.

Prayer for Their Comfort and Establishment

In verses 16-17 Paul closes the section with a prayer: "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, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work." This portion of Scripture serves as a reminder of the place of prayer and how Christians need to let God have His way in their prayer life. The prayer is addressed to the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. It mentions how they have loved us and how they have given us "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." On the basis of the prospect before them, they are to comfort their hearts and to be established in "every good word and work." In other words, their Christian life and testimony consists of what they say and do. Paul prays that they will be established, that is, be firm and faithful in the task that God has given. As we in our day face the challenge of our own lives, may these truths be not only for the Thessalonian church but may they grip our hearts. May we thank God that He did choose us. May we thank Him for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. May we thank Him that someone gave us the gospel and that into our hearts there came faith in the Word of God and in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us thank God for all He has done to us, and that now our destiny is to have the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. What occasions Paul's renewed note of thanksgiving?
2. What further teaching does Paul give on sanctification?
3. How is sanctification related to John 16?
4. Summarize the important works of God that relate to sanctification.
5. How does Paul contrast their coming glory and their present persecution?
6. How does the fact of their coming glory give Paul a basis for exhorting them to stand fast?
7. What is the content of Paul's closing prayer in Chapter 2?

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