

#2 of 1Thessalonians

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Last week we moved through verse 3 but something else about verse 3: 'remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father...'

Here, in this 'early' letter to one of 'his' churches, Paul is beginning to stress our responsibility, before God, that our love should be that which undergirds everything we do and every relationship into which we enter. He writes of our faith, hope and love. In 1st Corinthians he will expound on the same relationship between those 3: our faith in God, our love for all other believers and our patient, expectant hope in Jesus Christ's return for us at any moment.

Verse 4: '... knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.'

Salvation Belongs to Our God

Foundational to our understanding of God's great love and mercy for us, His children, is the correct understanding of His having chosen and elected us and of our complete security in Jesus Christ, that we are saved for eternity, having been given eternal life, that we are being kept secure in Him.

God's Word is replete with references to His having chosen and elected us:

'... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, ' Eph 1:4

'You did not choose Me, but I chose you' John 15:16

'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' 2 Thes 2:13

'Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.' Acts 13:48 What a marvelous verse: It does not say, 'all who believed were appointed to eternal life.' It says, all who were appointed to eternal life... believed. They had all been appointed to eternal life, before the foundation of the World, and when God's planned moment came, they believed.

Sadly, too many Christians believe that their salvation was their own doing and the maintaining of that salvation depends upon their correct actions. They believe some variant of the following... 'When I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart, He forgave me of all my past sin and then I became 'on my way to Heaven,' however it is very important that I live a 'good Christian life'. I should read my Bible, go to church, pray and not do any of many sins. If I don't faithfully maintain this lifestyle, if I turn away from God and church, then I can lose my salvation. I have to be careful, always.'

Tragically, this kind of thinking is really no different than that of the poor deceived Catholic, Mormon or Jehovah's Witness... 'My salvation is based on my works and if I am good enough and stay good enough, I'll go to Heaven and if I fail to be good enough, I will not, but I'll never really know for sure.'

The most sinister deception of all is the thinking that anyone can, in fact, ever be good enough to be saved and stay saved... even for five minutes!

That is the lie that keeps so many from understanding the reality of the true security of the believer, the full assurance of Salvation every true child of God has, forever.

If we could understand that we can never be good enough to be saved, or to stay saved, then we could begin to understand the reality that we could never be bad enough to become unsaved because our salvation does not rest in our own works at all... ever!

If it were possible to be good enough or bad enough... where are those magical lines, that when crossed, suddenly result in salvation, re-damnation or re-salvation? Seriously... is it telling a lie... going 8 miles over the speed limit... stealing a newspaper... being a homosexual... gossiping? You see, the Bible makes very clear that sin is sin... all sin is what Jesus Christ died on the Cross to pay the penalty for, and for the one called and chosen by God, the one whom the Bible calls, 'His Elect,' He paid the full penalty for all time of every sin past, present and future. That is what He meant when He said, 'It is finished!'

Here are a few scriptures where God tells us of the reality of the eternity of our Salvation... by the way, if eternal life could end or be taken away, how could it ever be called, 'ETERNAL LIFE?'

'But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.' John 10: 26-30 'And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.' Col 2:13 Paul is saying that you were dead... incapable of coming to God or responding to Him in any way. He chose you and made you alive in Christ... He completely forgave all your sins, nailing them ALL to the Cross of Christ, after which Jesus said, 'It is finished!' Now, don't you see that if it were not finished, every time we sin, it would have to be forgiven and atoned for again on the Cross... Jesus Christ paid one complete sacrifice for all our sin, for all time.

This goes to the heart of Satan's desire to convince us that we are not really spiritually dead from birth... everyone born since Adam and Eve have been spiritually dead from birth. No one has a 'spark of divinity' in them... no one has 'some measure of good' in them. God tells us we are sinful and dead... like it or not... The only people who are alive... having spiritual life, eternal life, are those to whom God has given His Own Life, and those who have been made alive, will never again be dead. It really is simple if we will allow ourselves to believe what God has said. The problem is that we don't want to admit that we were dead and incapable of coming to God, that salvation is all God's work from beginning to completion. Only He initiates it, only He completes it and only He maintains it. That's it! Only when we begin to understand this can we even start to comprehend the height, the depth and breadth of God's love and sacrifice for us.

Finally, let's look at a favorite verse to supposedly disprove our eternal security in Jesus Christ. To the Church at Sardis, Jesus writes in Rev. 3, 'He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.' They say, 'See, He says He will blot out your name if you don't overcome.' He never said anytime, anywhere, that He would ever forsake, leave, blot out any one of His children no matter what they ever did!

First, who is the overcomer? Every child of God, Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God... whoever is born of God, overcomes the world... 'And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.' 1John 5:4

You see, it is our saving faith which causes us to be an overcomer in God's eyes... not our deeds! He doesn't say He will blot our name out but rather, that He for sure will not!

When one came to an ancient city like Sardis, their name was written into the Citizen's Roll Book... one of the honors of being part of the city. When one was especially honored, they would be clothed in white and announced before the populace. For any number of crimes, one's name would be blotted out from the book of citizenship and they would be dispossessed, a great dishonor. What Jesus is saying here is, simply, that, 'I am not like those in worldly government. When I choose you, you are mine forever. I have forgiven you... I will keep and preserve you... I will never reject you, leave or forsake you, I will never blot out your name from My book of citizenship in Heaven... I will clothe you in white and I will confess you before My Father and before His angels. You are safe and secure in Me... never fear, never worry.'

'You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.' Eph. 1: 13 Paul is telling us that God's gift, of His Holy Spirit, to every true believer is the same as 'earnest money' when buying a house... 'I will give you \$15,000 to prove to you I mean business... It's a done deal as soon as my financing is worked out... I won't back out.'

God often uses the language of betrothal and marriage to describe His relationship to us... the Holy Spirit is like His huge expensive engagement ring He has given us to prove His love and absolute commitment to us.

Prov 2:32 says, 'the lord is intimate with the upright' We are upright and righteous in Jesus Christ. Answer this final question: Is Jesus Christ the type of Person who goes around getting engaged to someone, being intimate with her if it is not a 'full on' marriage arrangement in His mind, and then breaking off the engagement and throwing her away because she does something that displeases Him? Sounds more like Lucifer to me, and that is exactly why he's the one who is trying to convince you that unless you are pleasing

and walk 'right', you will be thrown away... that your salvation is not secure in Jesus Christ.

This is what God says to you: 'I have chosen you, I have drawn you to Myself and created My Spirit within you, I will never leave you or forsake you. You are Mine and you will never not be Mine. I will complete the work I've begun in you and I will present you faultless before My throne. You will be kept safe and secure in Me forever!

Is His election of me and His faithful protection of me a license to sin... does this mean it's fine for me to go about the business of sinning... may it never be!

Why do we walk uprightly and in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ until He comes for us in the Rapture? Simple! Whenever we choose to sin, we will have lost, despised, thrown away, eternal rewards of which we cannot even imagine: 'But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit.' 1 Cor 2:9

How is it that Paul could write of '*knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.*' Paul understood the mystery of 'the election of God' because the Lord Jesus Christ had taught it to him when he was taken up into Heaven after his conversion. He knew of 'their' election, that they were truly born again, because he could see the evidence, the signs which pointed to their being true believers: he saw their faith; he saw their love for each other and he saw their hope in the soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 5: 'For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.'

Of course, the Gospel must come, first, in word, but It also comes in power; the Holy Spirit empowers and enables the children of God to speak forth the Word: ' But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' Acts 1:8 'How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?" So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' Rom 10:14

To the elect of God, His Word comes as life but to all others, it seems, to them, foolishness: 'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." ²⁰ Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' 1 Cor 1:18

As the Holy Spirit, empowering the Word of God, produces in one the faith to believe unto salvation, He also creates the full assurance of salvation that one is, in fact, a genuine child of God, one who is saved and secure in Him: 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,' Rom 8:14 ' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Rom 8:37 ' And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the

Son of God' 1 John 5:11 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.' John 5:24

Paul often confidently referred to himself as a role model of a God honoring life, someone to be imitated: 'Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.' 1 Cor 11:1 'For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.' 1 Cor 4:15 'Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.' Phpps 3:17
Verse 6: 'And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.'

The Thessalonians counted the cost of turning to God through faith in His Son and were more than willing to joyfully follow Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ. To them, faithfully following Jesus Christ meant, sometimes, great persecution: the loss of friends, family, job, financial security, even life itself but they were willing to give up everything for the joy of eternal life. So dramatic was their conversion from death unto life that they were actually 'famous' in that they were known throughout the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia.

Verse 8: 'For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.'

This should serve as the example for Christians everywhere and in every time. Paul may have led the first Thessalonians to Christ and planted the Church there but it was the Thessalonians, themselves, who took the Gospel to their friends, family, neighbors and even strangers, causing the growth and expansion of the different churches there. Remember, it wasn't just one big church meeting in one large building that formed the Church of the Thessalonians; it was made up of, first, one family in one home and then growing to more families in more homes, needing more pastors and more meeting places and so on and so on. Paul didn't create and cause to grow the Church in Thessalonica or in Corinth or in Philippi or anywhere else. Jesus said, 'I will build My Church... and I will cause it to grow.'

Verse 9: 'For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,'

They were famous; so dramatic was their turning to God and away from idolatry that everyone, all around, knew of it. Their conversion could not be hidden which caused each decision to be even more impressive. A decision to turn from idols to serve the true and living God was not something someone claimed to do, in order to get a girlfriend; it was a life and death decision and most girlfriends simply weren't worth it. You either decided to or you didn't. Either you meant it or you kept your mouth shut.

Verse 10: 'and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.'

Here, in this one verse, Paul refers to the Rapture again... twice! '... to wait for His Son from Heaven.' The Lord Jesus Christ will come for us, His Church, His Body, His Bride and He will come for us, from Heaven, where He went after His ascension, where He went to sit down and wait until God makes His enemies to be His footstool and from where His Father will tell Him when it is time for Him to return to bring His Bride back to His Father's House. That is one reference to the Rapture. Then, in the same verse Paul tells us that we are waiting for Jesus Christ to come for us, in order to deliver us from the wrath to come. Paul means the wrath of God to be poured out upon the unbelieving World during the final seven years of the Tribulation. Paul is not referring to the wrath of God during the final Judgment. That will be a time of measured, controlled judgment. His Holy Wrath will have been justified, glorified and satisfied during the seven years of the Tribulation and culminating at Armageddon.

God's Judgment in the Final Judgment is not something from which we need to be delivered; in fact, we will be ruling and reigning with Him and will have been so for 1000 years during the Millennium.

As we said: Paul's teaching is filled with references to the Rapture... these are just three more in this chapter.