

2nd THESSALONIANS

2:13 – 3:5

Introduction

Love is the theme of these verses. If I were at all poetic I'd say love is like a subtle perfume lingering over them:

1. In Chapter two, verse thirteen, they are the "brethren **beloved** by the Lord."
2. In verse sixteen, Jesus Christ and God the Father have "**loved**" them.
3. In Chapter three, verse five, you read, "the Lord direct your hearts into the **love** of God..."

Love can be difficult to discuss. As soon as you start analyzing it, taking it apart, defining it, it starts to lose its essence. Instead of being warm and powerful, it seems cold and weak under the microscope.

Paul desired that all believers retain the warmth and power of love:

2 Thessalonians 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

His prayer doubles as an exhortation to pray. In other words, just as Paul asked for this, so should you and I ask Jesus to "direct [our] hearts into the love of God..."

We may be getting ahead of ourselves, but I need to point out something fascinating about this verse. Because of the way it's written in the original language, it can have two possible meanings:

1. It can be taken *subjectively* to mean, "the Lord direct your hearts into **your love for God**..."
2. Or it can be taken *objectively* to mean, "the Lord direct your hearts into **God's love for you**..."

It's not a matter of deciding which meaning is intended; *both* are intended! Exactly what you might expect when you're discussing something as deep and profound love.

We will organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Ask Jesus To Direct Your Heart Back To God's Love For You, and #2 Ask Jesus To Direct Your Heart Onward By Your Love For God.

#1 Ask Jesus To Direct Your Heart
Back To God's Love For You
(2:13-14)

"A system of theology in miniature." That is what theologians call verses thirteen and fourteen of chapter two. They are certainly packed with theology. I don't want to take away anything from their intellectual impact. But they are also full of love; they are full of God's love for you, and we don't want to overlook God's love as the foundation of what is said in these words.

Here's is what I mean: In just a moment we're going to read, "from the beginning God chose you for salvation..." It's the biblical Doctrine of Election. And immediately the intellectual battle lines are drawn as scholars and students of the Bible debate God's sovereignty in choosing you versus man's free will in choosing God.

Lost in the debate is the foundational truth upon which divine election rests: ***God loves you!***

I've felt cheated for the past twelve years. For at least that long I have had numerous debates and discussions with different folks over the Doctrine of Election. Mostly they think they have "discovered" that God's sovereignty means that man has no free will to choose. Their discovery leads them to many terrible conclusions; among them, the idea that just as God chooses some to salvation, He chooses others to damnation. In other words, billions of people have no hope of salvation because God decided not to choose them. He could have, but He didn't... And supposedly this reveals His love! Author Dave Hunt said it best in the title of his book on this subject, *What Love Is This?* It's **not** the love of God that is revealed in Scripture.

We're getting ahead of ourselves. I just wanted you to know that I am not going to go into the doctrinal *debate* but rather reveal the devotional *delight* of God's electing love.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 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,

Paul was "bound to give thanks" for the believers at Thessalonica because they would not be on the earth during the Great Tribulation. Since they had believed the Gospel and received Jesus Christ as their Savior, they would be Raptured prior to that awful day of God's wrath which was (and is) coming upon the whole earth.

Though not subjects of the Great Tribulation, they were still subject to trouble while on the earth. To further encourage them about their *present* sufferings and struggles, Paul took them back to their *past*. He took them really far back to their past, "from the beginning." This is *before* they were saved; *before* they were born; *before* the universe was created! For lack of a better term, I call it "eternity past." The Bible elsewhere calls it "before the foundations of the earth."

All the way back there, where God dwells outside the realm of linear time, you were "beloved by the Lord." The "Lord" is specifically the Lord, Jesus Christ. In eternity past, before the foundations of the earth, "God so loved the world" that He determined to send "His only begotten Son" into the world "that whosoever would believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Listen: The whole human race *was* and *is* loved by God, and Jesus' death on the Cross is sufficient to save "whosoever will believe in Him" without limit.

"God from the beginning chose you..." The word for "chose" is definitely describing God choosing to save you before you were ever born. In other portions of Scripture the word "elect" or "election" is used to describe this same thing.

This is where the doctrinal debate begins... *and never ends!* It's only a debate because we refuse to acknowledge that there are things we cannot fully know. Our minds are finite, but we attempt to resolve the

infinite. When we look back to eternity past we have a tendency to see only one of two possibilities: Either God chose you, or you choose God.

But see, we've already lost perspective. We've overlooked the love of God! Love requires there be a free will to choose. You cannot force or coerce love or it ceases to be love. God's choosing you in eternity past does not overrule your choosing Him in time; your choosing Him in time does not violate His sovereignty. These are not two exclusive truths, but one inclusive truth.

I'm not the sharpest saw in the toolbox of Bible doctrine... But among those who are, for centuries, there has been no satisfactory resolution to the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will that does not in some way ignore one truth or the other. What's worse, if you begin to exclusively emphasize God's sovereignty you violate His love. As I said earlier, God becomes a monster Who damns people to Hell who had no opportunity to be saved. That's just not true – not because we don't want it to be true, but because it's not what the Bible reveals about God.

If you are saved, it is because God loved you and chose you from eternity past. If you are lost, it is because you freely rejected God's love and refused His offer of salvation. You are chosen, but free to choose.

Back to our text: "The sanctification of the Spirit" is the work of God the Holy Spirit in setting you apart from sin to salvation. It starts when you are born-again. It is also a process of becoming more like Jesus that continues throughout your lifetime.

All of this occurs when you "[believe] in the truth." The divine choice to salvation in eternity past becomes operative through your faith. In plain language, you hear the Gospel and believe it:

2 Thessalonians 2:14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You hear and respond to the Gospel as it is presented to you. If you receive the truth, from that moment onward you are on a path "for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." God intends to glorify

you. He Who has begun a good work in you will complete it. One day you will be Raptured, your physical body transformed into a glorious body that can enjoy eternity future. Your soul and spirit will be finally and fully perfected to be without sin. You will be Jesus' trophy wife!

Paul was not trying to confuse these believers; he was trying to comfort them. He was directing their hearts back to God's love for them.

Let's stay in context: The believers at Thessalonica were suffering intense persecution, maybe even to the point of martyrdom. It was so bad that when false teachers tried to deceive them by telling them they were already in the Tribulation – *they believed it!* One of the spiritual strategies to overcome their fears and doubts was to direct their hearts back to God's love for them in saving them. He had determined to save them from eternity past; they believed God, responded to the Gospel, and were born-again. Now they were headed for glory. Their temporary sufferings and struggles could not separate them from the love of God for them.

If or when you find yourself suffering or struggling, then ask God to direct your heart back to His eternal love for you. Don't stumble over election as a debate; it is a delight, to comfort and encourage you on earth as you await the return of Jesus Christ.

#2 Ask Jesus To Direct Your Heart Onward By Your Love For God (2:15-3:5)

Your relationship with God through Jesus Christ is based on love, not law. While there are commands to follow, you desire to obey them because God loves you and only wants what is best for you. The more you contemplate God's love for you, the more you will be in love with Him. His love compels you onward in your walk with Him.

The remaining verses contain two simple exhortations that are grounded in God's love: Stand fast and walk in God's love, and Stand fast and run with God's love.

Stand fast and walk in God's love:

2 Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Earlier these believers were described as being "shaken." They are told to "stand fast." We might use the expression "hold your ground." Rather than being shaken, hold your ground and you will remain stable through your sufferings and struggles.

You stand fast when you "hold the traditions you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." We usually think of "traditions" as a bad thing. There are traditions of men that are bad; they are unscriptural and burdensome. But that is not what is meant here. This word refers to the handing down of God's truth to mankind. It was done in two ways: "by word" and "epistle." "Word" refers to the authoritative words spoken by the first century apostles of Jesus Christ. "Epistle" refers to the written Word of God.

Today there are no apostles in the New Testament sense of men speaking forth the authoritative Words of God. We have the writings and stand upon the Bible.

This is not simply an intellectual exercise; it involves your appreciation of the love of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 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,
2 Thessalonians 2:17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

"Everlasting consolation" is your present experience of comfort regardless circumstances because you are loved by God. "Good hope" is your looking forward to the return of Jesus and your final glorification. Both come to you "by grace"; they are God's gifts because He loves you.

Like any gifts, you must take them and open them. The more you do, the more you will find "comfort [for] your hearts" and be "establish[ed] in every good word and work." "Word and work" is a summation of your entire walk with God. "Establish" brings us back full-circle to standing fast. You stand-fast upon God's Word and He will establish you.

It is not a legal relationship; it is a love relationship. Seeing His love for you, you are directed onward in your walk by your love for Him.

The first four verses of Chapter three follow a similar pattern.

Stand fast and run with God's love:

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you,

2 Thessalonians 3:2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one.

Paul was still talking about them being "established" (v3), but now it was for the purpose "that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified..." He was talking about the spreading of the Gospel through preaching to the unsaved. It had spread to them and they had received it; they should desire it be spread to others.

Paul's prayer request indicates he was being hindered by "unreasonable and wicked men" – unbelievers who do not "have faith."

The basis of his request was that "the Lord is faithful." The Lord's faithfulness springs from His love for you. Like all love, it is protective: It "guard[s] you from the evil one." Now I often think God allows the devil too much freedom in attacking Christians... But truth is that I don't appreciate fully the love of God. **Nothing** can separate me from the love of God. The more things I encounter that try to separate me, the more my understanding of God's love is strengthened.

2 Thessalonians 3:4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.

Paul's confidence was "in the Lord." Jesus would accomplish these things "concerning" them. They were doing and would do "the things" they were "command[ed]" to do because Jesus was working a willingness to obey within their hearts.

You cannot help but obey Jesus when you see Him as He really is. His infinite love for you compels you to obey out of your ever-increasing love for Him. You begin to "run" with His Word as your *desire* rather than your duty.

Conclusion

There's another phrase in verse five we have not yet discussed: "Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God **and into the patience of Christ.**"

The "patience of Christ" also can have two possible meanings:

1. It can mean your patience in suffering while waiting for the return of Jesus.
2. Or it can mean Jesus' patient endurance of suffering.

Again, it means both. (1) You can be patient as you await the return of Jesus (2) by following His example of patience.

Why would anyone want to follow Jesus? Because He loves you from eternity past to eternity future. The more you appreciate His love, the more you are compelled to respond in love in the present – regardless your sufferings and struggles.

Direct your heart back to Jesus' love for you and you will be directed onward by your love for Jesus.