



Seized Before the Day

"Resistance is Fatal"

If I were at all poetic I'd say that love is like a subtle perfume lingering over these verses:

- In verse thirteen, they are the "brethren beloved by the Lord."
- In verse sixteen, Jesus Christ and God the Father have "loved" them.

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. I want to be careful to not diffuse or in any way diminish the love of God in these verses.

Take a moment and read, to yourself, verses thirteen and fourteen.

"A system of theology in miniature." That is what theologians call verses thirteen and fourteen. They are certainly packed with theology.

I don't want to take away anything from their intellectual importance. But they are also full of love; set in a context 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. You read, "from the beginning God chose you for salvation..." It's the Doctrine of Election. And immediately the intellectual battle lines are drawn as scholars and students of the Bible debate their version of God's sovereignty in choosing you versus man's free will in responding to Him.

It's really a debate about your understanding of the grace of God. Is grace irresistible? Or is it resistible?

- If you come to think that God's grace toward mankind is irresistible, then you arrive at the conclusion that those who remain lost in their sins, who perish for eternity, were not chosen by God to be recipients of His irresistible grace. They, in fact, are predestined for Hell - all, they say, to the glory of God.
- If you come to think that God's grace toward mankind is resistible, then you arrive at the conclusion that by His death on the cross Jesus frees the will of every human being to receive or resist the grace of God. God is no less sovereign to have freed your will to choose.

Sometimes lost in this doctrinal debate is the more foundational truth that **God is love and He loves you.**

Dave Hunt wrote a book whose title is, I think, a good field test of theology. Since we know God is love and He loves us, when you hear a position in theology expounded, ask yourself, "What love is this?"

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 of what we learned in the previous verses of chapter two: 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 is coming upon the whole earth.

To further encourage them about their future, 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, you were "beloved by the Lord." The "Lord" is specifically the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Let's frame the words of Paul within the perspective of John 3:16. 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.

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 for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." 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.

All Christians believe in election; it's what the Bible teaches. But there are at least three biblical ways to understand election. I'm not going to go into them here; but they are called unconditional election, conditional election, and corporate election.

For myself, I reject any theory of election that maintains God purposefully determined before the foundation of the world to damn the majority of the human race to Hell. I reject as unbiblical and not worthy of God any theory that He chose some but did not choose others when He could have done otherwise.

Love requires there be a freedom, or we might say a freeing, 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.

"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.

God's grace calls to every heart. By His sufficient, universal work on the Cross Jesus can free the will to respond to the grace of God.

Grace, however, is resistible and, tragically, there are multitudes who resist the grace of God and perish.

Jesus thought God's grace could be resisted when He prayed for Jerusalem, saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

The martyr Stephen certainly thought God's grace could be resisted when he told the Jews, "You stiff-necked people... you always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

Those who yield to the grace of God are on a path "for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." You're on your way to glory.

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.

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.

He that had begun this great work in them from before the foundations of the earth would be faithful to complete it. No amount of tribulation could separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus

If or when you find yourself suffering or struggling, then ask God to direct your heart back to His eternal love for you.

Let me give you a word of advice. 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.

If you do find yourself in a debate over election, emphasize the love of God.

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.

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 of the first century apostles of Jesus Christ.
- "Epistle" refers to the written Word of God.

For us it means to stand fast upon the solid foundation of 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.