

Perseverance

PERSEVERANCE IN FAITH

Focal Verses • 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13–17

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLAIN the basis of Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians; REFLECT on an experience where we stood or should have stood fast; and DETERMINE to comfort others or stand fast personally.

In Focus

Aaron and his wife Regina saw that there was still much work to be done at their church in the heart of an inner city. When they first joined the community 25 years ago, they were a young married couple and part of a church plant Pastor Jenkins had assembled. Nearly a third of the congregation was unemployed, the high school dropout rate was the highest in the city, and the crime rate was the highest in a generation. Yet, Pastor Jenkins encouraged Aaron and Regina to work with Robbie, who owned a construction company, to build the community in every conceivable way.

Over the years, with Aaron and Regina's financial investment, the church helped renovate many homes for congregation members, funded an after-school tutoring program, and provided jobs for many in the community.

Aaron was having lunch with an elder from a prominent church in their upscale neighborhood. The elder questioned why Aaron and Regina chose to be members of an inner-city church. Aaron felt the questions about his church attacked his integrity, but he decided to pray and ask God for wisdom.

One day, as Aaron studied the Scriptures, he ran across Luke 5:30–32. He realized that God does not call all of those that He equips, through His Holy Spirit, to work at churches that appear to have it all together—thriving spiritually and physically. God needs workers in struggling churches—churches that genuinely need the Physician, God. That day, Aaron and Regina recommitted to walking in their calling—to continue to feed God's sheep in the vineyard where God had placed them.

Aaron and Regina learned that God had called them to make a needed and lasting difference in a lost and dying world—in an inner city venue. In today's lesson, God is calling for commitment to His agenda—saving lost souls and helping to build His kingdom. What gives you strength to preserve in sharing the message of Jesus Christ to all the world?



Keep in Mind

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle”
(2 Thessalonians 2:15, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV 2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16 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,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

The People, Places, and Times

Faith and Perseverance. In this second letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul encouraged this struggling church to persevere (to remain steadfast in their efforts to follow God's edicts or commands) and to do the work that He had called them to do, even during their trials and tribulations. False teachers had given incorrect information about Jesus' second coming, and this had caused some of these believers to not only quit their jobs, but to be idle and wait on what they thought was His imminent return. Therefore, Paul wrote this second letter to correct this erroneous information and to persuade the church at Thessalonica to persevere (stand fast in their calling). Because he knew that some persecutions can cause even mature believers to tremble and sometimes fail in the testing of their faith, Paul wrote to encourage this church during their persecution.

Even while suffering, believers can continue to do good works, which is the greatest indication that their faith in the abilities or strength of Almighty God is pure (James 2:14–26). Therefore, genuine faith and perseverance are not the result of having faith in ourselves, but of trusting in a God who is true to His Word and has promised a final reward in heaven (1 John 5:13).

In addition, perseverance during trials and tribulations is an outward witness to a lost and

dying world that God can be trusted despite dire circumstances. Believers can have faith in what God promises. Perseverance and faith in almighty God build up the church and character in the believer who fights the good fight of faith (Romans 5:3–4).

Background

Paul, Silas, and Timothy founded the church at Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 17:1–10), but the apostle Paul had to leave in a hurry because of the degree of persecution there. In Paul's first letter to the church, he not only comforted these struggling believers, but also offered encouragement because they were still experiencing threats and other harassment for their faith in Almighty God. However, false teachings were also causing problems for this infant church because incorrect information about Jesus' second coming spread and caused some to quit their jobs and become idle. Idleness bred the sinful conduct of busybodies, who were minding other people's business. Therefore, Paul wrote this second letter to encourage the Thessalonians in their persecution and also to correct the false information. In addition, he wanted to instruct them to get back to work and remind them of the conduct of becoming children of a Holy God, set apart from sin.

At-A-Glance

1. Paul Encouraged and Affirmed the Thessalonians' Salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14)
2. Paul Encouraged the Thessalonians to Stand Firm in the Faith (vv. 15–17)

In Depth

1. Paul Encouraged and Affirmed the Thessalonians' Salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14)

Paul affirmed to these struggling Thessalonians that they were loved by almighty God, Himself. This great salvation that they had received had nothing to do with their merit but was because of God's favor. It was a gift from God. They, as we, could not earn it, but had to accept it as a gift. Paul reminded them that from the beginning, God chose them to be a part of His family, and through His Holy Spirit, God made them and makes all believers like Christ (Romans 8:29). In other words, believers' salvation is not because they have been so good or so kind. It is because a loving God had compassion and mercy on them and chose them to be His heirs. Therefore, believers can never boast about their salvation because everyone has to receive the forgiveness of sin through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour (John 3:16). No person took Jesus' life, but as Jesus said, "I [Jesus] lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:18).

In verse 14 of today's passage, Paul reiterated that God worked through Silas, Timothy, and himself to bring the Good News of salvation to the Thessalonians. Still, their salvation was all about God and His work and not about Paul and his companions, who, like us, are "fallible, unfaithful, untrustworthy human beings" (*Life*

Application Study Bible, 2412). Yet, God can and does take fallible, unfaithful, untrustworthy human beings and use them for His glory.

We, too, as believers, should recognize that our salvation is all about God and His work of building His kingdom that will reign forever and ever; it is not about us, His messengers who bring the Good News. It is, however, important that we remain vessels that He can use and that we represent Him well. Our lives should be a positive witness to a lost and dying world. Paul was an excellent example to the Thessalonians and to believers today as well.

2. Paul Encouraged the Thessalonians to Stand Firm in the Faith (vv. 15–17)

Now that Paul had built up the Thessalonians by encouraging them in the faith, he moved on to encourage them to stand firm in their faith. He wanted them to commit to faithfulness to the God who was more than enough in their times of trouble. The apostle knew that one threat to the church was false teaching or doctrine. Just as can happen today, falsehoods could cause believers to walk in a way that God does not intend for them to walk. For the Thessalonians, believing that the Second Coming was imminent had caused them to fall into the sins of idleness and being busybodies (meddling in other people's affairs). Of course, a lost and dying world saw this idleness and confusion in the church. This was indeed a negative witness. It did not represent a Holy God well. Paul, therefore, urged them to commit and hold on to the foundational truths that they had been taught from the beginning of their faith and to get back to work.

Believers are to always refer back to the foundational truths of God's Word to test any new doctrines that arise. If these doctrines contradict the Bible, then they are not to be embraced. Thus, believers are to stand firm in God's truth and this truth is in His inerrant (error-free) Word. In addition, believers are to stand firm against apathy, indifference, lack of interest in God's work,

false teachings, and worldliness. These culprits can creep into our walk with God and cause us to stumble or lose our zeal for God's agenda.

In verses 16 and 17, Paul ended this part of his letter by reminding the Thessalonians that it was God who loved them and gave them "everlasting comfort" with His special favor ("grace") and hope through salvation by believing in Jesus Christ. According to John 10:28, Jesus said, "And I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This means that Jesus protects believers from harm forever and ever. All believers can expect to suffer here on Earth. Yet we have the assurance from God Himself that Satan cannot harm our souls or take away our eternal life. Jesus paid the price in full when He died on the Cross.

Paul then prayed that this same God would both comfort the Thessalonians' hearts during their struggles as well as give them strength in everything that they do and say.

We should also be reminded that it is the almighty God who granted us the favor of His wonderful salvation, and He and only He can comfort our hearts during the many struggles that we must face. We must recognize and appreciate that persecution is a part of our Christian reality. However, we are not alone in our struggles. As King David said, "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble" (Psalm 9:9). Therefore, "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name is to be praised" (Psalm 113:3). He alone can help believers to stand firm in the faith. We should, therefore, definitely commit to Him.

Search the Scriptures

1. Who chose the Thessalonians to be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:13)?
2. How were the Thessalonians sanctified, that is, set apart from sin and made holy (v. 13)?

3. How did God call the Thessalonians to salvation (v. 14)?

4. In verse 15, what was Paul's message to the Thessalonians?

5. Paul prayed that who would comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work (vv. 16-17)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean to "stand firm" in the faith?
2. How does one stand firm in the faith?
3. What tools can believers use to help them stand firm in the faith?

Liberating Lesson

In this time of economic, mental, and spiritual failures and uncertainties, the church is called upon by God to commit to standing firm in her faith. Biblical principles are being challenged in many venues in terms of abortion, gay rights, marriage between one woman and one man, stem-cell research, etc. Many are looking to the church for answers to the many problems that are plaguing our society; they are looking for the church to be that light upon a hill, giving hope and showing them God's way. In essence, many are looking to the church for leadership.

The church stands on a firm foundation when it stands on the Word of God. In these trying times, are you standing on His Word? Are you an example of Christ in your home, community, workplace, and so on? Are you committed to God's agenda?

Application for Activation

Examine your own life and see if there are places where you need to shore up your stand in God's Word and enhance your commitment. Determine today that you will pray about those areas and will walk in God's will and His ways.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Edited by Leslie F. Church. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961. 1884–85.

Life Application Study Bible (New Living Translation). 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004.

Youngblood, Ronald F., gen. ed. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995. 969–70.

Say It Correctly

Sanctification.

sank-tuh-fuh-KAY-shuhn

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 302

Acts 21:1–40

Psalm 130

DAY 303

Acts 22:1–30; 23:1–11

Psalm 131

DAY 304

Acts 23:12–35; 24:1–27

Psalm 132

DAY 305

Acts 25:1–27; 26:1–32

Psalm 133

DAY 306

Acts 27:1–44

Psalm 134

DAY 307

Acts 28:1–31

Psalm 135

DAY 308

Romans 1:1–32; 2:1–16

Psalm 136

Notes
