

2nd THESSALONIANS BIBLE STUDY

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Lesson #3

Introduction

In our last lesson we got into the first twelve verses of this chapter, that are dealing specifically with the troubling and disheartening false teaching that the Day of The Lord, that is the tribulation period, had already begun. Now this could have been an encouraging teaching if the Thessalonians had been taught by Paul that the catching away into the air, the gathering together to be with the Lord Jesus forever, was something that happened after the tribulation had started. If that had been the case they would have been excited and encouraged. But clearly that wasn't the case. The Thessalonians were shaken and troubled Paul said in verse two, by this false teaching, because he had clearly taught them, as is recorded in first Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, that their catching away into the air to be with Jesus must precede the tribulation, and this is the whole reason for this entire chapter of this epistle. In 1st Thessalonians chapter five, verse nine, he told them that God had not appointed them for this event, but rather He had chosen them to receive salvation from it by the catching away before its commencement, solely to the praise of His glory.

The first twelve verses of this chapter are a very specific reaffirmation and clarification of his earlier teaching on this matter. I acknowledge that there are many who don't believe in this catching away that Paul taught, and even claim it's not taught in the Bible, but those Thessalonians sure believed it, and that's why they were so upset, and why Paul had to write this epistle, and especially this second chapter. People are free to believe whatever they please, but to claim that Paul never taught the Thessalonians that they would be caught up into the air to be with the Lord, or that he didn't teach that it would precede the Day of the Lord's wrath is absolutely untenable, when held up to examination against the teaching of these chapters of scriptures.

Just as Paul told those saints in Thessalonica, please don't let anyone deceive you by any means, and cause you trouble, or shake your faith in the verity of scriptures. All that Paul taught was inspired by God, and inerrant, and can be trusted implicitly in its plain and literal interpretation, when its speaking in the literal sense, as it's surely doing in these verses that we're studying now.

As an example that the Day of the Lord's wrath hadn't started yet, and couldn't have started yet, Paul used the example of the coming man of lawlessness, also called the man of sin, and the antichrist, because he opposes and exalts himself above all that's called God, and sets himself in the temple to be worshiped as God. Paul gives some very specific details of his workings and his false signs and miracles so that he can be clearly recognized by those who are the chosen of God; but he will not be recognized by those who reject the truth of the person of Jesus Christ, and the truth of His gospel, because they love their unrighteousness too much to acknowledge the obvious. These will blindly follow this deceiver because God will send them a strong delusion of mind, and stifle their normal faculties of conscience and logic, so that they may freely and openly indulge their passions and lusts without restraints or limitations, neither external nor internal. They will be set free from all natural and godly restraints so as to literally self-destruct.

In verse eight of chapter two, even before he describes the characteristics of this coming man of lawlessness, Paul pronounces the inescapable outcome of him and his followers. Both he and they will be destroyed by the breath of Christ's mouth and the brightness of His coming. With nothing but a spoken word and the brightness of His holiness, Christ will utterly consume this antichrist and his entire army of lawless followers.

Now, we're caught up to where we left off in the first twelve verses, and we can proceed to the final five left in this chapter. At this point Paul switches his focus from the antichrist, and his kingdom and its characteristics, back onto the saints and the church of Jesus Christ. Let's read those verses which I've titled:

Stand Fast and Hold to the Teachings

13 But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, either by our message or by our letter.

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word

2 Thess 2:13-17 (HCSB)

Paul had said in verse 12, “so that all will be condemned—those who did not believe the truth but enjoyed unrighteousness,” so now he uses the words, “But we” to indicate the contrast and establish a distinction between the two groups. We must always thank God says Paul, and calls them his “brothers loved by the Lord,”

But it's the next few words that make us take pause. Paul says “because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation”, and then goes on to explain exactly how God proceeded to carry out that choice. But before we look at the means, let's look at the first aspect, the words that God has chosen us for salvation from the beginning. From the beginning of what we might ask? Some argue that it's from the beginning of our believing the gospel, but that's not possible because the next part of the sentence tells us how God Himself proceeded to make that happen as well. So this beginning is clearly a beginning that precedes our faith and belief. So what beginning is Paul referring to here? The holy scriptures themselves tell us precisely what it means, if we desire to know the truth:

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. Romans 8:28-30 (NASB)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Eph 1:3-6 (NASB)

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. 1 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB)

So, what beginning is Paul referring to here regarding God's choosing us for salvation? It is undeniably the beginning of the creation of the universe. (Eph 1:4) We're told by Paul, and reaffirmed by Peter, that God chose each individual by name for salvation before He ever began His work of creation. Not a single name will ever be lost, nor a single name ever be added. This book was written and sealed before creation began. (Rev 13:8, 17:8) This isn't opinion or speculation, it's holy scripture, breathed by God and recorded for all posterity. It's divine and unchangeable truth that God has chosen to reveal to all mankind who have ears to hear it. It's a stake through the very heart of all human pride and all human accomplishment. It completely removes any credit whatsoever that man might want to take for his own salvation. It completely squashes any possibility of human boasting, and lays all the glory, and the credit, on the mercy and glory of God's sovereign grace alone. (Eph 2:8-10)

Our salvation is entirely a monergistic work, initially motivated and then performed entirely by God, but amazingly, not against our own will, but rather by the very use of that will. It is a profound truth that the sovereign providence of God works itself out by and through the free exercise of man's own will, not in opposition to it. It is the unforced will of man that God providentially directs and steers to ultimately accomplish all His own predetermined plans. (Pastor Roy Hargrave) God uses the unforced will of both angels, and of men, to steer the predetermined course He has set for all creation.

While a man may be free to exercise his own will, that doesn't by any means mean that his will is absolutely free of limitations and influences within itself. One may very well do as he pleases, but **what** he pleases in his mind is subject to the makeup of his mind and his own nature. He isn't actually free to decide what he likes or dislikes, he's just free to choose to do or not to do those things that his mind innately desires.

No one is ever dragged into heaven kicking and screaming, as one dear brother once asked me. No one can, or ever will be saved in opposition to his own will to be so. And yet, apart from God's grace to regenerate the heart, and transform the mind, no man would or could choose to repent and believe. But, when the grace of God appears, the heart is changed, and the sinner freely and desperately calls on Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior, to forgive them and save them from their sins. This is the amazing grace of God, working itself out in tangible time and space, by and through the free, uncoerced, exercise of man's own will. The sinner freely wants to remain a sinner, and the believer freely wants to repent and believe, and all according to the predetermined plan and grace of God from before the foundation of the world.

For the sake of clarity let me add that there are always those who, upon hearing this teaching, immediately ask "what about the person who really wants to be saved but isn't one of the elect?" Doesn't that person even have a chance for salvation? The question itself reveals that this person hasn't come to terms with the reality that there are no such people. There never has been, nor are there now, nor will there ever be any such people. Not one human ever has, or ever will, of his own unaided choice, want to repent of sin and believe God. There is none who seeks after God, not even one. (Rom 3:10-12) Any and all who come to repentance and faith, do so solely by the gift of saving faith predestined by God from before creation. Not one person will want to believe God, and submit to His authority, unless that person is specifically called to this desire by God. One must fully and rightly comprehend the depth of the depravity of man, to be able to fully appreciate the manifold grace of God. Now, moving on to the next part of verse 13, Paul says:

Verse 13b: (Concerning our being chosen from the beginning for salvation)
through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

There is a **means** that God uses to accomplish His predetermined end result of salvation of His chosen. Of course He could simply speak into being whatever He desires, but for good reason He's chosen to use various means to get His work done. Not because He has to, or because He needs help, but because it's to our benefit that He does so. It is through the setting apart of His elect, called sanctification that God calls His people into His salvation. Apart from sanctification there isn't any salvation. The calling of God is through, and by way of, this process of sanctification, and by belief in the truth.

And what is this truth that one must believe? Well, it's not just some simple little catch phrase, or a certain set of facts; it's the whole message presented by the Lord Jesus concerning man's sin and His righteousness. It includes our acknowledgment and confession of our sins, and a genuine desire for repentance. It includes the full recognition that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no salvation in this universe apart from His substitutionary death for our sins **and** His imputed righteousness for our sinful and imperfect lives. We could go on and on, but these are the bare essentials of the *belief in the truth* Paul is discussing in this verse. This is absolutely exclusive truth. Peter declared "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12) It's either Jesus, or it's just another Satanic or human deception. There are not multiple ways to God, there is just one, and God determined what it is. If you don't believe this, then you don't believe the truth.

This sanctification is in part immediate and complete, in so much as it applies to God's setting apart. But it's ongoing and progressive so far as it applies to the called and chosen. It is a lifelong process that is intended to impart a genuine hunger and thirst for perfect righteousness, because, it is an impossible task to complete on our own, or in this earthly realm. Our lives on earth are our training grounds, and our school rooms, to introduce us to the holiness and righteousness of Christ, and at the same time make it absolutely clear that there's no other source of that holiness and righteousness except from Him. We are set in an environment, designed and created by God himself, where we must learn by hands on experience, the value of the gift of God. The value of a kingdom that allows no sin. The value of perfect holy righteousness. Sanctification is the process of seriously striving for, and thereby learning the immense value of, genuine godliness. And developing a passion for it that utterly consumes us, as it did our beloved Savior.

Jesus said that every good tree bears good fruit. For years I was taught that this means that every believer would produce more believers by avid evangelization. The fruit was supposed to be the number of converts you produced. In fact, there's masses of churches who still think this is what fruit means, and spend their every waking moment devising scheme after scheme, and plan after plan, to reach more of the lost for Jesus. The problem is that they don't understand that the Lord knows those who are His, (2Tim 2:19) He selected them before creation, and every scheme, and every plan of man to augment and embellish the gospel simply produces masses upon masses of tares, which are immediately sown into the churches, until they're completely overrun with false converts. And such is the case today. The true issue of salvation is that it produces a sanctified people, who love God, love Jesus, and demonstrate it by the active pursuit of righteousness and sanctification.

It doesn't seem like very many people who call themselves Christians seem to understand this. For most it's simply a matter of seeing how many people we can convince to pray a sinner's pray and keep them out of hell. After that, everything else is optional. While this pursuit seems honorable, it's nonetheless misdirected. Concerning salvation it was Jesus Christ who said that He would not lose a single one of those whom the Father has given Him (Jn 6:39) from before the foundation of the world. (Eph 1:4)

Verse 14:

He called you to this [salvation through sanctification and belief in the truth] through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ

Yes, we certainly must preach the gospel, because that's the *means* that God uses to call His elect to saving faith, and commence the resultant process of sanctification. No one is saved by simply being among the chosen and elect. There are many of those who are the predestined elect of God that are as yet unsaved, because they haven't yet been called unto saving faith through the hearing of the gospel and the imparting of the Spirit of God. (Rom 11:25; 2Pet 3:9)

For these, the means haven't as yet been implemented, so, we must continue to preach the word, with accuracy and clarity. We must preach the whole word, and nothing but the word, without embellishments, which tend to illicit spurious emotional responses. But we aren't to concern ourselves at all, not one wit, with the number of responses, whether great or whether small, but only with the resultant sanctification that follows true saving faith. Unless we see a sanctification process working itself out in the lives of the professing believers, then we aren't doing the job God set before his church to do.

In second Corinthians, chapter six, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to come out of those false religious systems they used to practice and follow the true and living God. He calls them to separate themselves from the sinful practices of the unbelievers, and not to continue to practice those old things they used to do. He commands them not to make unholy alliances with unbelievers, nor to associate with them in their practices. And then he reminds them that God has promised to welcome them, and be a Father to them, and make them His sons and his daughters, *if* they will come out of those old ways and old practices, and sanctify themselves unto godliness. Then he says in the first verse of chapter seven:

1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.
2 Cor 7:1 (NASB)

Beloved, the first and foremost task that any and every believer has been assigned, is that of pursuing a sanctified life. The first and foremost obligation of every church is the corporate exhortation and mutual encouragement of one another unto holiness of lifestyle, a life that's lived to the glory of God. A never ending progressive sanctification that eagerly awaits its consummation at the coming of Jesus Christ, who will Himself complete it by the power that He has to subject all things to Himself. (Phi 1:6; 3:21)

Nearly every church that I've visited, and attended, before we started this one, was convinced that their first and only significant mission was to win converts to Jesus. They will usually acknowledge that the Bible does speak of sanctification, but they put very little real importance on it, and the honest one's will admit that they have very little, if any, of it. So they just keep devising an endless stream of fresh and new schemes to present the gospel which will more effectively win converts to Jesus; and the sanctification, or lack thereof among those converts, becomes a total non-issue.

That's between them and God they declare. These "would be" evangelists have pushed everything else, including sanctification, out the back door. Along with most of the real believers I might add.

This is not even close to what the scriptures teach about the purpose and task of individual believers, or about the corporate duties of the churches. In Ephesians four Paul speaks about why God has assigned various gifts of ministry to the churches. He says:

11 And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, [growing] into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.

Eph 4:11-15 (HCSB)

And then again in his epistle to the Romans Paul tells them the purpose that God had when He chose and predestined a specific people for salvation. He says:

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Romans 8:29-30 (NASB)

The salvation that God has afforded to man is implemented by, and through, the means of sanctification. By the conforming of the believers to the image and likeness of Christ. In fact, if there's no signs of sanctification, then there's no point in salvation in the first place, at least from God's point of view, because the salvation afforded by God is specifically designed for the purpose of producing a separated and sanctified family of worshippers.

The point of God's salvation isn't to keep you and I out of hell, *(Repeat that)* it's to make you and I into a sanctified, transformed follower of Jesus, and thereby a suitable member of the kingdom of God. Being rescued from hell is actually just a by product of the purpose of God for saving His elect. But, since we've all but forgotten what God wants, and put our entire focus on what we want, we've made man's escape from hell the whole purpose, and plan, and desire of God.

We are so far off target, so self-centered, so man-centered, that we can't even perceive of any other reasons for salvation, or the immense magnitude of our error, and our astonishing arrogance. The sovereign God of the Bible is all but forgotten, and has been replaced by an idol, fashioned by the carnal minds of man. And sanctification has become an option, that believers may either accept or ignore at their leisure.

Beloved, let me make it perfectly clear. On the authority of the word of God, I declare to you that there is no such thing as salvation that's apart from sanctification. God's purpose for salvation is to produce sanctification, therefore where salvation is, sanctification is there also, doing its intended work of transformation to Christlikeness in the believer. If there's no signs of sanctification, then there's no reason to conclude that any salvation has ever taken place.

If your church isn't teaching you sanctification and obedience to the word of God, then it isn't helping you at all, its hindering you, and you should start looking for one that knows and teaches the truth. The process is a bumpy one, and there's periods of seeming success, and periods of heartbreaking failures, but the process is happening, and the believer is continually growing in the desire for, and appreciation of, holiness and godliness. There is a true and genuine heartfelt desire to really be like Jesus, and to be able to please Him by perfect obedience. There's a growing hatred for the sin that still clings to our flesh, and a longing to be forever free from its destructive influence. These are the natural signs of a regenerated, born-again believer, and any absence of them should be cause for serious concern to anyone who considers themselves to be a Christian.

I was in a church just after I was converted where the elder once said, concerning the issues of lifestyle and sanctification, that as believers we should probably expect to get worse, not better. I was very young in the Lord at the time, but I had read enough of the Bible to know that this wasn't what was said about born-again believers in the scriptures.

Later I, and some others, were eventually expelled from that church because we wouldn't go along with filing a lawsuit against a Christian brother who had said publically that we were perhaps more of a cult group than a church. He wasn't entirely right, but he wasn't entirely wrong either; but either way, the Bible clearly forbids such action, and when we read the appropriate scriptures from 1st Corinthians six, and questioned the scriptural legitimacy of a lawsuit against another brother, we were immediately labeled "opposers" and the hatred and hostility we received from formerly loving brothers absolutely astonished me. All because we suggested we should obey the holy scriptures instead of the supreme leader of that church organization, who had personally instigated that lawsuit.

As traumatic as this whole thing was to a young naive believer like myself, it was a very valuable lesson to me. It was right there that I learned that the cruise to the kingdom wasn't a lazy ride down a gentile stream. I was absolutely flabbergasted that this church would freely chose to deliberately ignore the clear word of God. It was there that I first had to make a decision as to whether I should go along with the crowd and keep the peace, or break ranks and obey the scriptures, with all the ramifications that it entailed. For me it really wasn't any question, I believed then, and still do, that the scriptures are the very inerrant word of God. That they carry all the authority of His sovereign majesty, and if any human on this earth speaks contrary to them, then he is wrong, and the scriptures are always right, and always applicable. One cannot just chose to ignore them when it seems expedient. God is always God, and his word is always binding.

The process of sanctification must start there. It must start with the understanding that the scriptures are the sole source of divine truth and authority. The apostle Peter said that the scriptures are everything we need for life and godliness. (2Pet 1:3) No man, and no angel, who contradicts them is speaking from God. Sanctification must start with a uniform standard to which all must seek to conform, and we have that standard in Jesus Christ himself. He is the embodiment of sanctification, to which all God's chosen are commanded to strive to emulate. We're not just told to stand back and admire Him, we're told to follow Him at any cost, (Luk 9:23) to grow in His stature, (Eph 4:13) and be transformed into His likeness. (Rom 8:29)

These are not options that a professing believer may choose to implement at his leisure, these are the commandments of scripture on the lives of the chosen, to prepare them to be the inhabitants of the eternal kingdom of God. They are a description of the life processes of every true believer that is fashioning them to be the children of God, and they are the defining characteristics of the wheat, which distinguish them from the multitudes of tares, growing side by side in the same field. The call of the scriptures is a call to repentance and faith that is demonstrated; that is worked out in our daily lives, (Phi 2:12) by a progressive sanctification of life and thinking which is transforming us towards Christlikeness. And there's no salvation that's void of this operation, because it's an act of the Holy Spirit, (Phi 2:13) not a simple option exercised at the discretion of a professing believer.

It is this to which we are all called by God for salvation. The gospel is a call to sanctification, which is worked out by the power of God working on the will and the works of His chosen. Every gospel presentation must be presented as a call to follow Jesus in absolute subjection. To surrender all to His Lordship authority, and begin a life of progressive sanctification that will be difficult, and bumpy, and even perhaps dangerous, but this is the narrow gate and difficult road that leads to eternal life, and there's no other means of entry. (Mat 7:13-14) This is the **means** that God himself has chosen to implement the salvation and preparation of all those whom He predestined before creation; we dare not preach another gospel. (Gal 1:9) Now, moving on to the final verses of the chapter:

Verses 15-17:

15 Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, either by our message or by our letter. 16 May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word.

After having reaffirmed the preceding truth of their calling, Paul exhorts them to stand firm in those teachings that they had received from him, both by his earlier preaching and by his letters that he sent them. It isn't sufficient to just know the truth, or even to admire the truth, but according to the scriptures we must also walk in that truth, if we are truly children of God. Paul concludes this section of his letter with the reminder that Christ and The Father love us with an eternal love,

and provide us with the grace and strength to persevere in every good word and work. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion:

In these final verses of chapter two, after speaking of the coming “man of lawlessness” in the preceding verses, Paul turns his attention back to the believers, and reaffirms the teachings by which they were called to salvation. He reminds them that this salvation is a gift of God, and that it has both a means of implementation and a resultant effect, and both of these are predetermined by God.

The means by which He calls His elect is first the gift of saving faith, that is, the belief in the essential truth of the gospel message. The belief that we are a lost sinner deserving of God’s wrath, and that the only hope of redemption is that God will accept the death of His perfect Son Jesus as a direct substitute for our own sentence of death for the sins that we’ve committed. If not, then we must pay that sentence of death ourselves, every single one of us. No one is innocent, no one is good enough to escape the consequences. (Rom 3:10-12, 23) Salvation includes this truth, and there is no salvation apart for it.

Secondly, salvation is brought about through sanctification by the Spirit. There is a forensic element to this sanctification by which God sets one apart by decree, but that’s not the element being discussed here. The sanctification Paul is discussing here is that ongoing and progressive work of sanctification by which God is molding, shaping, training, educating, and finally preparing a specific people to be the eternal companion for His Son, and a family of acceptable worshipers for Himself, to populate an eternal kingdom that He has planned in advance. Paul wrote to Titus:

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. 15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Titus 2:11-15 (NASB)

The grace of God that has appeared to mankind, and is bringing their salvation, is for the purpose of setting apart a specific people for God’s own possession, who are zealous for good deeds. A people who deny ungodliness and worldly desires and strive to live sensibly, righteously, and godly right now in this present age. This is the sanctification by the Spirit that we’re discussing.

Sanctification by the Spirit is the whole process of preparation for suitability of that kingdom family. Salvation is for the purpose of sanctification. If there is no sanctification going on, then there is no family preparation being made, and God isn’t getting what He has saved a people for in the first place. Salvation is not about keeping people out of Hell, it’s about preparing a sanctified family of God.

Of course we can’t complete this work by ourselves, or even in this lifetime, the final completion has been reserved for the Lord. (Phi 1:6, 3:21) It has to be that way to exclude pride and self-reliance apart from God. He made it this way for exactly that reason. (Eph 2:9) But the preparation process must be happening in the life of every genuine believer, or there’s no eternal purpose for that professing believer, from God’s point of view. From our man-centered point of view, we just want to be kept out of hell, but from God’s point of view there is a very specific reason that He has kept some of His creatures out of hell, and that’s to sanctify them unto Himself as a holy family.

God does not save some men simply because he wishes to be nice to them, He saves some of them because He intends to have a family of His own who will appreciate, serve, obey, and worship Him eternally. It’s not about man, it’s all about God. We hear that saying all the time and we say “Amen”, but then we completely ignore what it means.

Both the early churches, and the present day contemporary churches, are filled to overflowing with liberal, man-centered preachers presenting a gospel message of prosperity and wealth. A message that man is the center and purpose of the universe, and God's whole purpose and mission is to "be there" for mankind. That He exists and lives to be the servant to His creatures, and sits idly by hoping they will pay Him some attention so he can spring into action on their behalf. This perception is as pitiful as it is absurd. Arthur Pink wrote that the glory of the perceived god of this present age no more resembles the glory of the sovereign God of the bible than the flame of a candle resembles the brightness of the noonday sun. (paraphrased)

Today's churches have all but abandoned the preaching of sanctification, and the ramifications are obvious. We have whole churches, and whole denominations, that are 90 percent or more composed of unregenerate members. And the few who are genuine believers are fed a constant diet of pabulum instead of real spiritual food. Sanctification has been replaced with systematized evangelism, and the fruit of the spirit is now defined as how many converts we get, not how sensibly, righteously, and godly our converts are living in this present age. Our perceived primary mission is to simply divert as many people from hell as think we can, with no concern whatever for subsequently sanctifying them, and aiding them in their transformation process into Christlikeness, for their suitability as the family of God, for which they were saved in the first place, if in fact, they really were saved.

We, as the professing church, have not done well at protecting these precious truths, so we need constant reminder. We need constant reproof, rebuke, and exhortation to earnestly contend for these saving truths by which were set apart, and by which we are being sanctified and transformed into that suitable family of God.

Paul ends this chapter with an exhortation for the believers in Thessalonica to hold fast to these teachings, these traditions that he had taught them when he was there with them, and was now reaffirming in his letters. We will all do well to take heed of his warnings and exhortations, for that time of our Lord's return is closer than ever before, maybe even right at the door. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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