

Parallel Affirmations

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Today we're looking at verses 13 to 17, particularly verses 13 to 15.

2 Thessalonians chapter 2 at verse 13. But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits, or you could translate that God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

I'm sure we've all seen these little tiny miniature Bibles that you can get just as a kind of object of interest in many respects, because they're so tiny, just sort of small square, and although you need a magnifying glass to read them, apparently the whole of the Bible is actually printed there in such a very short, small space, squeezed into that tiny little box-like object.

Well, in this passage, it's something like that with regard to our salvation, and at least our coming to be saved and our experience of salvation in Jesus Christ.

[1 : 29] Because what the apostle is doing is bringing together two particular parallel lines of affirmation, or assertions that he makes, affirming or confirming the salvation that God has for his people, and how he has brought his people to actually possess that salvation.

So it's in many respects the actual possession of salvation that Paul is dealing with here in a miniature sort of fashion. So that, as we'll see in these verses, things which are widened out and given in more detail elsewhere, in his letters and in other parts of the Bible, he actually brings here to be compressed, as it were, into these two great parallel statements.

And as we go through them, we do notice that they are actually given as a reason for thanksgiving on the part of the apostle and some of his own companions as well. We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you, and so on.

The things that he's going to say about them, and how they've come to possess salvation, are the ground of his thanksgiving here. And in fact that's set in the context of a letter that is setting out very clearly some of the things that must happen ahead of the Lord Jesus Christ return.

And that was in some ways causing the Thessalonians some perplexity along with the question of what had happened to those who had already died. He dealt with that in the first letter, but he talks here about them not being shaken in mind or alarmed at the beginning of the chapter that this day had already come.

[3 : 16] Because some people were going about trying to convince these Christians in Thessalonica the Lord was not going to return. There wasn't going to be such a thing as the actual return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What was meant by that was something that had already happened. He had already come. He had died on the cross. He had risen and gone to heaven. That was it. There's nothing else left for him to do in which he is actively involved in this world.

And Paul is saying, don't actually be quickly shaken in your mind or alarmed or somewhat confused by the spirit or spoken word or a letter that seems to be from us.

You see, some of these people were going so far as to present written letters or a written document that purported or pretended to be from the apostle that it had apostolic authority and setting out their teachings so as to actually bring the Thessalonian Christians away from the teaching that Paul had given to them.

And he says, don't be taken in by that. Things are as we originally told you. And therefore, you are in the way that you have come to possess this salvation.

[4 : 28] We ought to give thanks to God for you. And then he goes on to affirm what that salvation is against that background of all that was happening trying to take them away from these things that are certainties.

The apostle is saying, this is what I want you to focus on. These are the core issues of your salvation. And the ground of our thanksgiving is that you have come to possess them.

What are they? Well, they are parallels, as we've said. First of all, there is salvation from God's choice through God's spirit.

Where he says there, He has chosen you to be saved through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth.

And then the other, the parallel to that is He has called you through our gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when you put these two lines together, these lines of teaching in parallel, you hold them in parallel together and you'll find that they actually come to the same thing in the end.

[5 : 35] In other words, when he's saying there that God chose you to be saved through sanctification of the spirit, it's the same thing in a sense of saying He called you through the gospel to obtain glory.

The glory that's mentioned there is the equivalent of the saved that's mentioned in the previous one, the parallel verse in the part of the verse there, verse 13.

So these are the two things that we want to look at side by side, but realizing that we're looking at two parallel things. We're looking at the same thing essentially, the salvation and the possession of it, but looking at it in two parallel lines that speak of different aspects of it as they exist side by side.

First of all, he says that God chose you as the first fruits. Now the best, I think the best translation there is like the authorised version has God chose you from the beginning.

And that's the way that it can be translated and makes better sense I think to take it that way, although this translation is also possible. But in any case what he's saying is that their salvation actually goes right back to God's choice.

[6 : 48] What the Bible elsewhere calls God's electing love. This is of course a great subject and one which some Christians have over the years actually decided not to accept because there are difficulties with it.

That God has chosen his own people from all eternity as Ephesians chapter 1 tells us that in love he predestined us to the adoption of sons. He elected us in him, Paul is saying, in Jesus, before the foundation of the world, before there ever was a creation.

God had his love set upon the particular people to be his people. And Jesus to the disciples in John 15 and verse 16 he said to them which may have initially just meant their coming to be his disciples and followers in this world he said, you have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.

You have not chosen me but I have chosen you. Because you see, when you look at what we are ourselves by nature as Paul says in that chapter in Ephesians chapter 2 we are the children of wrath we follow the ways of the world we don't make a choice of God even if we have something floating in our minds or through our upbringing that God exists that there is such a thing as God's work in Jesus Christ even if we know the gospel still if we are left to ourselves entirely and if the matter of our coming to possess salvation is absolutely left to our own choice it is not going to happen is it?

Why is it not going to happen? Because we ourselves and our choice is governed by our fallenness our sinfulness our will being set upon that which is not pleasing to God we say you were chosen by God from the beginning to be saved now there are some difficulties of course with the fact that God has chosen his people out of the whole mass of humanity that there is a specific choice made by God from all eternity of a people to be his and some people say well that's not fair why choose some and not others that's not fair that means that some can't be saved well we can't understand all of these things because our minds are human and our minds are colored by our humanness and our own fallenness remember we're talking about the sovereign God the Lord of all the earth the one who has the right to do as he chooses the wonder is that he chose any at all the wonder is that he actually came and gave his son to die for those people that he had chosen from all eternity that they would be rescued from their sin and you know people say well in that case there's no point to actually trying to come to accept

[10 : 05] Jesus Christ to come to repent of sin and a lot of people use the teaching of the Bible in a fatalistic way especially people like yourselves who are used to the gospel and you'll find some people actually coming to say well if I am chosen by God from all eternity that means I will actually be saved and therefore I can leave it at that well you can't because the Bible here tells you in the earlier part of the chapter there at verse 10 those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved that's the reason why they're perishing that's the reason why they'll be lost because they refused there's a deliberate act of will on our own part not to accept

Christ and you and I mustn't say well if I'm going to be chosen if I have been chosen by God inevitably I'll be saved and I don't need to do much about things at the moment I'll just keep coming to church I'll just keep reading the Bible or whatever but I don't need to concern myself about repentance and faith nowhere in the Bible do you find any evidence whatsoever that a person comes to be saved that any of God's elect people come to be saved without repentance without faith without coming to Christ without coming to yield themselves that hold persons to him as the Lord as their saviour every single aspect of that is required of us in order to be saved and when we're saved we can see that what holds our salvation together is God's work God's choice God's election of his people from all eternity in other words as somebody put it you mustn't regard God's choice as something that keeps you out of salvation it's actually something that keeps you in salvation when you've come to

Christ when you've accepted him when you've acknowledged him as your Lord and given your life to him then you can look to God's choice and say well obviously there was something before I chose him that led to my choosing of him and that is God's choice of me and it's in that that I find my security not the confidence with which I hold on to him but the confidence in which he holds on to me the completeness of that salvation so that's what he's saying with regard to God's choice we're giving thanks because God chose you from the beginning and he chose you to be saved that was the specific purpose in God's choice of his people to be saved that was what he had in view in his election of them that is what he had in view of his choice of them to be his people before they ever existed God's choice of them in love God's love settling upon them regarding them as his people with a view to their salvation with an intention and a purpose to save them and save them through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth there's the side of it where our experience comes into view because we're not simply saved because God chose us to salvation we are saved through sanctification of the spirit and belief in the truth the two things go together sanctification is really in a sense what the Bible refers to as making something holy the vessels for the sanctuary for the temple were called holy because God had specified that they be set apart for him for the use that was made of them in the temple so they were made holy in that sense now you can't make something holy that's an object rather than a person in the sense that you're working in a person the spirit of God works in a person to make them holy from inside so holiness really means to begin with something that has to do with being set apart for God and that's the first part of holiness or sanctification for those who are saved as well in our experience of it when the spirit of God comes to work in our lives when he comes to open our mind to the truth when he comes to unite us to Christ by faith what is happening we're being set apart we're actually being consecrated to God for his use for his service that's something that God dynamically is doing with regard to our persons he's coming into our experience in a way that through his spirit actually takes hold of our lives as Paul says in his testimony to the Philippians in chapter 3

Jesus Christ apprehended me he actually laid hold of my life of my person of my past my present my future everything about me he took hold of me and he set me apart but sanctification has another aspect to it as well and that is the one the catechism mentions where the spirit of God works in our hearts in our souls and enables us by his power to die more and more to sin and to live and to righteousness in other words sanctification really is on our part the pursuit of holiness dealing with our sin and our sinfulness dealing with those things that we know are to do with sin and with a sinful lifestyle and increasingly what the spirit enables us to do is to cut out these things or kill these things put to death the deeds of the body as Paul puts it elsewhere and as the spirit does that and sanctifies us so what is happening really is that we are being prepared for that ultimate stage of salvation as the next part shows with

Christ in glory now just because it says here it's through sanctification of the spirit again it doesn't mean that all we have to do is just relax and the spirit of God is working in us and he's taking account of everything and taking care of everything and therefore there's nothing really for us to do

in respect of our sanctification that is not what the Bible again teaches us if you go to what Paul says to the Romans for example you have that verse which specifies is that if you through the spirit mortify the deeds of the body you shall live the spirit is not doing it for us but we are doing it through the spirit it is you and I that must kill sin it is you and I that must actually put it to death it is you and I that must ensure that it no longer lives in our lives but what he is saying is

[17 : 36] I have given you my spirit's power to enable you to do that to enable you to do that it is you that must do it as my people he is saying but in order to enable you to do it to make sure that it is done to make sure that it is accomplished I have not left you to your own power to the energy of your own spirit I have given you my Holy Spirit that is essentially what God is saying that is why Paul is here saying you are chosen by God unto salvation through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth that is what he said as we saw earlier about those who are perishing they refuse to love the truth and so be saved being saved involves believing in the truth the truth here being the truth presented in the gospel the truth of God's salvation in Jesus Christ the truth about God himself about our condition about what

God has provided for it the truth in all the aspects of the core issues of our need as sinners and the salvation that God has provided for us in Jesus Christ the truth is believed and believed just means more than just intellectually giving you an assent to it because when you really believe in the truth you act according to the truth you act according to the demands of that truth the requirements of that truth which is why the psalmist in the old testament put it this way that he wanted God to help him to store or to treasure his word in my heart so that I do not sin against you so there's the first parallel then that God has chosen you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the spirit or through the spirit and belief in the truth and then he accompanies that with the other side which we can deal with more briefly the other parallel line is that to this that means to this salvation he has called you through our gospel that you may obtain the glory of our

Lord Jesus Christ he speaks there about God calling us and the call of God again is a wonderful thing when you think of how the Bible speaks about it there is such a thing as being called through the gospel simply the outward call of the gospel where you hear the voice of Jesus saying come unto me and I will give you rest that is the call of the gospel itself addressing you addressing me coming to us to address our minds our souls and saying where you are is where you need to move from in order to come to me and coming to me means moving into life coming to possess God is more than that it's not just an outward call that you hear where the voice of God is addressing you and calling you to himself the effectual calling again the catechism wonderfully summarizes this for us is the work of

God's spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our will he persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ offered to us in the gospel a great summary that is but this part of it is really the part of it we're interested in just now it is what it's called there a persuading and an enabling of us you see God having chosen his people from all eternity to be saved in their experience in this world through his spirit and through the gospel he calls them he sends them an effectual summons he doesn't just call them outwardly through the word of the gospel he calls them inwardly through the work of his spirit when somebody receives a summons to come to court the summons is served an officer of the court or whatever usually delivers the summons maybe it's delivered by mail whatever but there is nothing in that summons itself that guarantees that that person will appear in court and some people don't obey the summons and they abscond and they have to be apprehended and arrested for not having appeared in court after being summoned there isn't any efficacy any power inbuilt into the summons itself it can be rejected and ignored serious of course if you do that but in this case the summons that

God sends in effectually calling us is a summons that has an in built ability to respond and that is because it is the spirit of God that is working in that summons it is a work of God's spirit persuading and enabling us to embrace Christ the spirit of God both persuades us and enables us to welcome Christ into our possession that's why it is an effectual summons and he has called them by that effectual summons he's called us through the gospel notice he calls it our gospel there's a sense of course at which it wasn't Paul's gospel at all and he's at pains elsewhere to emphasize that this is not his possession his gospel it is God's gospel it is the

[23 : 52] Lord's gospel but here he's saying he's called you through our gospel why is he saying to the Thessalonians that it's our gospel well because again he's concerned to emphasize for them

that the other versions that they're hearing about these other letters that they're getting the kind of teachings that they're meeting with that want to take them away from what had been taught by Paul what he's saying is that the gospel that we initially gave to you and presented to you and preached to you our gospel in that sense is the gospel through which God called you to his glory in other words in times of crisis which really the Thessalonians are meeting Paul is not advocating that they in any way change what they think the gospel to be what they believe the gospel is the gospel he says is what we first of all preach to you the news of

Jesus Christ as a savior as we delivered it to you that's how it stands and when the church faces a crisis sadly it's all too often been the case that instead of continuing to what Paul calls here as we'll see in a minute to stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught instead the idea is that we have to adjust the gospel we have to change this and that aspect of God's truth we have to actually present things in a way that is different it's not just simply the presentation of it though it's the actual content itself that sadly adjusted or tempered or somehow or worked in a way that denies basic gospel truth just as one example there's no longer such a thing as miracles people will have you believe don't believe in the supernatural that was believed in generations ago and things like Jesus actually physically rising from the dead that's not what resurrection means it's just the continuance of his teachings as the apostles remembered it and passed it on to the generations following these are adjustments to the gospel these taking the core issues of the gospel and actually changing them so as to suit whatever thinking is currently the case in whatever generation we belong to and that's sad and that's serious because what it's actually doing is taking away from people the very thing that God has given us through which we come to be saved we see tonight something more of the importance of the resurrection as taught by Paul and others by the scripture itself but in the gospel of Luke especially where Jesus confronted the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection but what we're dealing with here is really the same thing he called you through our gospel he called you through the very teaching the very good news that you heard from us in the beginning when you're confronted as we are today with all kinds of ideas that this is really what the gospel should be saying this is what we should understand by things like the resurrection or the need to be born again or this is what we should understand now of the flood of Noah's day or the teaching of and just them in thinking with scientific discoveries and other issues that really mark where we are as human beings today God has given us his gospel it is our gospel in the sense that we maintain it as God has given it to us you can't be saved by a phantom you can't be saved by an idea you can't be saved by a theory these are just things which come and go and change with the passing of time you are saved by a person you are saved by facts you are saved by the things that Jesus has accomplished and that remain accomplished and that will always be the basis on which we are saved through the gospel which is set down in God's infallible word in this Bible we don't actually change that just so as to fit in with current human thinking if it opposes things that are in that

Bible well so be it the only hope for them is that we bring them back to the Bible that we bring them back to the gospel as God has given it to us otherwise we and they are left in a hopeless condition so it's through our gospel he's called us that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ well the glory of Christ of course will be revealed his own glory but he includes in this the glory that he has for his people the glory with which they will be glorified as well and what a fantastic future it is for God's people that they're going to be not just with Christ but glorified together with him as he himself says in chapter 1 verse 10 he talks about when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints in his glorified people to be glorified with

[29 : 47] Christ the two parallel affirmations what today do we have what do we have confidence in in facing every crisis in life what do you come back to what is it you go to time and again in order to assure your heart that all is well with your soul isn't it this that God has in fact chosen his people from the beginning to be saved through sanctification of the spirit and belief in the truth isn't it that God has called us through his gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ you see that's what Paul finishes the way he does so then brothers these words so then are so important so then brothers on account of this because of all that I've said and what is contained in it stand firm and hold to the traditions that you are taught by us stand firm don't give in to teachings that will suggest that some or other you're not really you're not really meant to keep the

Bible intact as it is as the generations go on stand firm and hold the traditions that's a word which can have a wider meaning than here it doesn't mean traditions in the sense of the way you do

certain things like in the free church for example some of these traditions may themselves be good and worth keeping but they're human traditions at the end of the day in the sense that they're not all based on an actual command of scripture what the traditions that are meant here are the things that were passed to the apostle by God in other words the core distinctives of the gospel itself they came to Paul by God's authority that's the secret to that's what he means by traditions the things which have divine authority for the doing of them and the divine authority for our belief of them hold on to them don't give these up because your confidence in

God is itself based on the conviction that what God has passed on to us through the apostles through his spirit through his truth that these are the things that we can have confidence in if you leave that and go to your own understanding or the understanding of someone else then you're leaving behind the very basis on which you can have confident assurance that God will finish the work that he has begun in his people therefore so then rather stand firm and hold on to the traditions that you were taught by us may God bless these thoughts to us let's pray Lord we give thanks for the things that we have had passed on to us through the apostles that you inspired and to whom you gave these bodies of teachings that they passed on to the church and we thank you for all that is contained within this written word that you have given us and we pray Lord for the help of your spirit not only to apply them to ourselves but to stand firm in them and to hold fast to them so that we may meet the challenges of our age confident in your own truth we pray these things Lord confessing our sin accepting and seeking that you would accept us now for Jesus sake amen thank you I