

But we are always obligated to thank God for you, brothers, loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctifying work of the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴For this reason he also called you through our gospel so that you would obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brothers, stand firm and hold on to the teachings that were passed along to you, either by word of mouth or by a letter from us. ¹⁶May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word. (EHV)

Theme: I thank God for your Faith.

1. He chose you to be saved through the gospel.
2. Hold on to the teachings you have learned.

I thank God for you. I thank God for your faith. I thank God that you are part the body of believers through faith in Jesus Christ. And I thank God that you show your faith. I thank God for everyone who braved the roads this morning or are watching online. I thank God that you listen to our sermons and participate in our Bible Studies. I thank God that you spend your time and make use of your gifts and abilities as you volunteer at God's house, and for the firstfruit offerings that you give to the Lord!

And I thank that the Lord that you don't do it because of us! You aren't here today because of us, to listen to me, but because of the Lord! If you were here just for me, the Church would be completely empty today! Your faith has led you to do these things. You sit in the pew and attend Bible Study in order to praise and thank the Lord and learn more of his word. You volunteer your time because this is the Lord's house, and you want to take care of it. You give your offerings not to the church, but to the Lord out of love and thanks for all that he has done for you!

I thank God for your faith! I don't thank you, but I thank God for your faith, just as Paul thanked God for the faith of the Thessalonians to begin our text for today.

This is the second time in this letter that Paul expressed his gratitude to God for the faith of the Thessalonians. At the beginning of the letter, he thanked God that the Thessalonians were growing in their faith despite the persecution they were facing. This second time that Paul thanked God for the faith of the Thessalonians is for a slightly different reason.

Paul founded this congregation during his second missionary trip. Later on, during the trip, while he was staying in Corinth, he wrote his two letters to them. One topic that Paul addressed in both letters to them was the End Times, and the coming of Christ on the Last Day. In this second letter he addressed the topic of the Antichrist, or the man of sin, as he is referred to in verse three of chapter two.

This man of sin sets himself up in the Church, opposes God, and exalts himself above God in and in the place of God, as if he were God. The devil helps the Antichrist out with counterfeit miracles and the like. And so, he has deceived many and he will continue to do so until the Lord comes again and reveals for all to see the Antichrist as the imposter and deceiver that he is. So here, to open up our text, Paul thanks the Lord that the Thessalonians had not fallen victim to the Antichrist, or any other teacher for that matter, but that they were still part of the one true faith!

And so, the same stands for you. I thank God that you are still Christians, that you are part of the one true faith. Even though the Antichrist still rages on today; and many other antichrists, or false teachers, are running around with their false teachings, leading countless away from Christ and his pure Word, you are still in the one true faith, a member of the body of believers.

Why? Because God chose you! As Paul writes in verse 13, **because God chose you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctifying work of the Spirit and faith in the truth.** From before the beginning of the world—before it was ever created, before there was sin in the world and sinners in need of salvation, long before you were ever conceived and born into sin, the Lord chose you to be saved!

So God chose you purely by his grace. It wasn't anything you have done or would do. It wasn't because you were a nice guy or that you would believe in him. How can any of that be true—he chose you before the world was created! It's not as if God looked into the future and saw who would believe and then choose them on the basis of their future faith. That would be putting the cart before the horse and make your salvation dependent on something about you. Your faith is a result of God choosing you, not a reason for it!

And so, as a result of God choosing you, you have the sure and certain confidence of eternal life in heaven. As Paul writes in verse 14, **For this reason he also called you through our gospel so that you would obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Our election took place before the beginning of time; but now, in time, God is setting into place what he had decided in eternity to do—save you.

And so he brought you to faith—through the waters of baptism or through the Word, he brought you into the one true faith and welcomed you into his family. Through the same gospel—the Word and the sacrament of Holy Communion, he has kept you firmly in the one true faith. And he will continue to do so through those same means, until he calls you home at your death or he comes again on the Last Day. And the final result will be that you'll see Christ in his full divine glory as he shares that glory with you forever in heaven! And this is sure and certain! Because your election to salvation depends on God and his gracious act, and not on you in any way, you can be sure and certain that you will be saved for eternity!

But sometimes we ignore God's Word. Sure, you're here today or watching online, but what about the rest of the week? I pray this not the only time during the week that your faith is fed. The purpose of our worship services isn't just to grow in our faith, it's also about praising God. That's only 30-45 minutes a week of being fed by the gospel if you are doing nothing else than worshipping on Sunday. And that's assuming that you are actually paying attention the entire time! Because let's be honest, it's all too easy to let our minds wander during worship or in Bible study, or reading our devotions at home.

And how often doesn't God's Word get pushed aside completely; let alone the sacraments—when is the last time you received the Lord's body and blood in the Holy Sacrament? You fail to make it to worship on a particular week, your daily devotion gets pushed to the side today because you've got something going on. And that one day quickly becomes two, then an entire week, and soon it becomes a habit. Bible study—I don't know what excuses you have for missing such an important aspect of our faith-life, but let's just say the far majority of even our own members who attend worship have found something more important to do with their time. So let's go back and look at verse 13 and 14 again. The Lord chose us to be saved and because of this he called us to faith through the gospel. Again, it is through the gospel that the Holy Spirit does his work. Through the gospel the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, or makes us holy, as he brings us to faith. For it is faith that receives the blessings that Christ has won for us. Being in the Word and sacraments is so important because it is the means by which the Lord carries out his act of election by bringing us to faith.

The rest of Scripture teaches the same time. Paul in Romans 1, **I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.** And Romans 10, **faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.** And 2 Timothy 3:15, **from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.** And Jesus himself in John 17, **sanctify them by truth, your Word is truth.** These passages we know by heart; but how quick we often are to forget their actual message!

The gospel is the means by which God's carries out his gracious act of election—of choosing us to be saved. Just because you are a believer now, doesn't guarantee that you will be one win you die. You'd like to think that if you are a believer now, you'll always be a believer—but isn't necessarily the case. If you fail to remain in the gospel, if you don't feed our faith on a regular basis, your faith will get weaker and weaker until it dies completely. Even God's chosen nation, the Israelites, who saw his glory, spoke to him, and saw numerous miracles performed on their behalf, fell away from the Lord—and if they can, you can too. That is why Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 10, **let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall.** From choosing us before the creation of the world, to giving up his life on the cross, to bring us to faith and then to heaven—God gets all the credit whenever some is saved. But mankind gets the blame whenever someone dies in unbelief.

And that is why it is so important to remain in the Word! And that's why Paul urges the Thessalonians to, **stand firm and hold on to the teachings that were passed along to you.** With so many false teachers out in the world today, just as there were during Paul's day, it is important to hold on to the teachings you have learned. Not because you have learned them from me or Pastor Gartner, or Pastor Suhr, or any other pastor or teacher, but because they are true words of Scripture, the blessed water of life! And not only to hold on to them yourself, but to share that word with others, and to defend this truth, standing firm in the truth of the gospel against all attacks. For it is this gospel by which the Holy Spirit works and makes us holy. And so I thank God for your faith! I thank God that he has brought you to faith and that he has kept you in the one true faith. I thank God that he has led you to abound in every good work and word—that he has led you to live your faith by your words and actions.

I thank God that he has given us his gospel and made it available to us whenever we want! And I pray that the Lord would work through that gospel to keep you in the one true faith, that you would remain in the gospel, stand firm in the truth of God's Word and defend it against all attacks. That you would not succumb to the false teachings around us; but that the Holy Spirit would keep you in the one true faith until you are called home.

And the Lord will do just that. He will give you his grace and grant you eternal encouragement and good hope. Because God chose you, you will live with him in heaven forever through faith—that's your eternal encouragement and good hope! And so, I thank God for your faith and pray that he keeps you in that one true faith until his election is complete and you are with him forever. Amen.