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2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-17

We're almost through with our study of *Thessalonians*. We have only one more week after this lesson, and then we'll be in the *Book of Deuteronomy*.

According to God's Word, there is coming a day when Satan will absolutely and completely dominate a man's life. This will happen, I believe, after Jesus comes in the air and saved people have been taken to heaven.

Satan will so possess this man that he will be known as the "man of sin" or the "antichrist." He will oppose everything that God has ever said, and he is going to lead many astray.

Last week's lesson told us of this man's doom. Last week's lesson told that the Lord will destroy him with the breath of His mouth. The Bible also tells us that those who are led astray by the antichrist also face a terrible end...

Verse 10 tells us they **perish**. This doesn't mean they cease to exist. The Bible tells us of a literal place called hell. It was prepared for the devil and his demons. And the devil and his demons deserve to go there. Down through the ages...they have created havoc and heartache. **They have broken up marriages. They have abused children. They have committed murders. They have started wars...the war our country is involved right now can be laid at their feet.**

The devil and his demons deserve to go to hell, but if people reject Jesus Christ and the atonement He wrought at Calvary, if folks say "no" to Christ's invitation for all His precious blood to wash their sins away, then by their own choice they will **also** spend eternity in hell. **Every person who goes to hell will be there by his or her own choice and we'll see more of that later in this lesson.**

According to **verse 12**, unsaved people are headed for judgment...they are condemned and they're headed for eternal hell.

That's basically what we saw last week. However, look at

Verse 13...

Anytime we see the little word **"but"** in the Bible, we know it's a word of contrast.

Paul has been talking about the Antichrist and those who will follow him.

Paul has been talking about unsaved people...lost people, people who have rejected Christ, people who would not believe the truth...

And he said "they're going to perish and they're going to be condemned to hell because they have rejected the truth."

But...then, he begins to talk about Christian people!

I want to tell you this morning...it really makes a difference if you're saved or lost. There **really** is a difference in a Christian and an unbeliever.

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Jesus makes a difference in your **life**.

He makes a difference in your **death** and He makes a difference in your **eternity**.

Paul has been talking about the eternity of the lost, but he says, “but there’s something different for the child of God...” And that’s what we’re going to see today. **And what a difference it is! What a contrast it is!**

Verses 13-14...

In these two verses, Paul uses four words that properly describe believers...

1) “**brethren**”; 2) “**beloved**”; 3) “**chosen**”; 4) “**called**”.

The term “brethren” is a family term. I don’t know what you think about when you hear the word “church.” Some folks think of a **building**, don’t they? But, the church isn’t a building. Some folks think of an **organization**, but the church isn’t an organization. Some folks think of a denomination, but the church isn’t a **denomination**, is it?

In the **New Testament**, one of the most profound concepts of church is family!

There are two spiritual families alive in this world today. A person is either a member of the family of God or he’s a member of the family of the devil. **Now, everybody who’s a member of the family of the devil isn’t a murderer of a rapist or a thief or into immorality. There are some upstanding, good, morally upright people who belong to the devil’s family.**

Everybody who is in the family of the devil is lost. And the only way a person can get out of the family of the devil and into the family of God is to do what Jesus said to Nicodemus when He said, “You must be born again”!!

When we’re born again, we’re born into the family of God! And I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God! Aren’t you?

Not only does Paul call them “brethren,” he also calls them “beloved.”

The thing that makes hell so horrible is not just the physical torment, it is also the absence of God’s love!

Think about it...

Right now, the unbeliever is blessed by God’s love. I mean, every time an unbeliever sees a sunrise or a sunset or hears the birds sing or smells a rose or holds a little baby, he’s enjoying the blessings and the love of God. The Bible says God brings rain upon the just and the unjust...

But, when an unbeliever dies, those blessings stop. When an unbeliever dies, every expression of God’s love stops.

What makes hell so horrible is the **absence of God’s love**. And what makes heaven so wonderful is the **presence of God’s love**.

I believe with all my heart that heaven is wonderful and beautiful...gates of pearl and streets of gold and walls of jasper...the fellowship of all our saved loved ones...I believe with all my heart that heaven is so beautiful that it far, far surpasses anything we can ever imagine, but that’s not what makes heaven so wonderful! What makes heaven wonderful and beautiful and heavenly is the presence of the precious and unrestrained love of God!

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However, we don't have to wait for heaven to experience that love, do we? Paul says we are "beloved by the Lord" right now!

The holy, sovereign and almighty God of this universe loves you and me!!! That's an incredible thing to me!

And we're part of a family. We're brothers and sisters of a family that is called the church. We don't all **look** alike or **think** alike or **talk** alike or even **believe** alike, but we all in some way resemble the Head of our family and we're becoming more and more and more like Him!

So, Paul describes us as **family** and **beloved** and he also uses the word "**chosen**."

Now, we could spend the next six weeks exploring all the different views this one little word has generated, and of course, we're not going to do that, but let's try to see a little of what it does and does not mean in the short time we have today.

As most of you know, there is a view of the word "chosen" that teaches that God chose some folks for salvation and He didn't choose others. This is commonly known as "extreme" or "hyper" Calvinism.

My prayer today is that I won't muddy the waters for you about this teaching.

Let me ask you...

What does Scripture say about this? Did God choose some for salvation and not choose others? What does God's Word teach us about the sovereignty of God and the free will of man? If God **chose** us, did He go against our free will to do it?

Well, to begin with...we know that God **is** sovereign. He is above and before all things. He created all things. He knows all things. He can do all things. He accomplishes all things. He rules over all things....all this and more can be said about the sovereignty of God.

But, God also gave man a free will. You and I are free to believe this book or not. You and I are free to believe Jesus is our Savior or not.

The problem comes when men decide that God overrides man's free will and picks and chooses those who will be saved.

What does God's Word say in **John 3:16**?

"For God so loved the **elect**, that He gave His only begotten Son..."??

No, "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.**"

Now, if you say that only certain people are chosen and only certain people can be saved, if certain people are not chosen...you will take the "**whosoEVERS**" in the Bible and make them a lot of mumbo-jumbo.

God said in the **Book of Isaiah**, "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which

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is not good, **following their own thoughts.**"

Remember in **Matthew 23**, when Jesus began to lament over Jerusalem and He said,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not."

Now, if they didn't really have a choice...if they **could not**, rather than they **would not**, then what Jesus was saying to them doesn't make any sense, does it?

The Lord doesn't drag some people kicking and screaming to heaven and send others who are crying out for His salvation to hell.

Peter tells us in **2 Peter 3:9**:

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some of you count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

It's not God's will that any person go to hell. **But God's will is not always done!**

Do you think rape or murder or adultery or blasphemy are **God's** will? NO! God gave man a will. **God's** will is that no man perish, but because God did give **man** a will...some **do** perish. Those who perish, however, do so in spite of God's doing everything He can to prevent it...everything, that is, except take away our free will to say "no."

Let's think about this another way.

What motivated the Apostle Paul? What made the Apostle Paul so committed to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible? What made him willing to be **beaten** and **imprisoned** and **shipwrecked** and even **martyred** for the cause of Christ? Why didn't Paul just say, "Well, some are chosen and some aren't...so why should I go from place to place and city to city and get beaten and all that if God has already chosen some to go to heaven and some to go to hell?"

Why should Jesus give us the commandment to go into all the world and preach the Gospel if God has already chosen who are going to be saved?

I read this past week of a young man who lived back in the 1800's and he desired to go and share the Gospel with the heathen of the world. He went to his "spiritual advisor" to share with him this desire. This advisor told this young man that he didn't need to go on the mission field...that God could and would save folks without him...that God would save the heathen if He wanted them saved. Thankfully, this young man listened to God rather than his spiritual advisor and went anyway. This young man was William Carey, who was a great missionary to India... "the father of modern missions."

Why should the our missionaries that we've sent out from this church go? Why should they go to the uttermost parts of the earth in order to bring folks to Jesus if it's already been decided?

Jesus said, **"If any man thirsts, let him come unto Me, and drink"** (**John 7:37**). I believe this is a legitimate offer of salvation...a sincere, definite offer of salvation. If you don't come, the

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reason is not because you were not chosen or elected. The reason you don't come is that you're not thirsty...that is...you don't think you need a Savior. When a man realizes his thirst can be quenched only by the Lord Jesus, he will come, won't he?

Jesus said in

Revelation 22:17: "...the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

Jesus said, "**I am the Bread of Life...**" But, a man must realize his hunger, mustn't he?

We take meals over to our neighbor (when I cook) and he always, without fail, says something like, "Oh, you all didn't need to do that!" But, you know what? He always takes it! If he didn't take it, it would do him no good, would it?

Well, let's get back to this verse in **2 Thessalonians...**

"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation"

Now, the folks who take the extreme view of election say that this verse proves their point...but we must finish the verse...

"...God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

Paul doesn't seem to be referring to the sanctification of the believer here...but the sanctification...the setting apart...of the unbeliever.

See, there is a definite time when the Holy Spirit of God comes to the sinner and woos him and convicts and places in his heart a deep hunger and thirst and desire to turn from his wickedness and follow Christ. In a sense, the Holy Spirit draws a circle around the unbeliever, sets him apart and says in effect, "It's your time..."

The ones who are chosen for salvation are the ones the Holy Spirit of God convicts **and** they believe the truth. See, they are chosen through sanctification by the Spirit and "**belief of the truth**" (KJV).

C. S. Lewis puts it this way:

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self choice, there would be no hell."

Dr. J. Vernon McGee puts it this way:

"The 'whosoever wills' are the chosen...the elect.
The 'whosoever won'ts' are the non-elect."

There was a man named Harry Ironside, who used to pastor the Moody Church in Chicago. He was a very wise man. I have several of his commentaries.

Harry Ironside put it this way...

"Here is a man and he's walking down a hallway.

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He sees a door that says, 'whosoever will may enter'.

So, the man decides to enter through that door. He goes in and he comes to a gorgeous banquet table. It is laden with food and he walks over and looks and there is a card with his name on it setting right on the banquet table.

There is a place prepared for him...and the person who prepared that place knew he was coming even before **he** knew he was coming!

Hey, this man just decided of his own free will to go in there...and there his name is and he sits down and he looks around for the door through which he had come in and he looks and above the door were these words: "**chosen before the foundation of the world.**"

You say, "Well, I don't understand that," and I say, "Neither do I." I truly cannot understand how the sovereignty of God and the free will man can both be true at the same time. But, aren't you glad we serve a God we don't understand? I mean, the secret things belong to the Lord our God.

The reason we have difficulty with this, is that we're trying to see it through the wrong lens. We're trying to see as God sees it. God doesn't operate in time and space as we do. God is in another dimension. God sees the beginning and the end and everything in between. **God doesn't take away your choice just because He knows your choice.** If God were to back off and not know it, you would make the same choice.

Well, I do hope and pray I haven't confused all of you...

In the time we have left, let's see what else Paul says to the Thessalonians in this chapter.

We are 1) **family**, we are 2) **beloved of God**, we are 3) **chosen...**

Verse 14 also tells us we are "**called**"...

And how are we called? **Through the gospel...**

The greatest privilege in the world is sharing the gospel with someone and seeing God call that person to Himself through the gospel.

God is so good! He honors our obedience. My husband and I were talking just this past week about Cornelius. Cornelius, if you'll remember was a Gentile. In fact, he was a Roman centurion. Somehow, and we're not told how, but somehow Cornelius became a God-fearing man.

Acts 10:2 tells us he gave alms to the Jewish people and he prayed to God continually.

And we all know what happened... God honored the fact that Cornelius was obedient to the light he had and God sent more light. He sent Peter to tell him about Jesus. **Remember, Peter was reluctant to do this, but when he did finally get to Cornelius' house, Peter gave him and the folks Cornelius had gathered there the precious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.** He told them how Jesus died on a cross and how He was raised on the third and how He appeared to many people...

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And God's Word tells us that while Peter was speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

See, God looked down through the corridors of time and saw that Cornelius would have a heart for Him. Cornelius was assigned to Israel. From all indications, this wasn't considered "glamorous duty" for the Roman soldier. I mean, no one really wanted to go to that area to serve. They would much rather have been in another part of the Roman Empire.

But, God made sure Cornelius would come under the teaching of the Jews. And Cornelius realized the Jews served one God, not many as the Romans did. Cornelius embraced this belief.

But, God didn't stop **there** with Cornelius. Cornelius was prepared by the Holy Spirit...he was ready to be saved even before Peter was ready to show him how. The Holy Spirit wooed Cornelius and convicted him and gave him a hunger and thirst for salvation. God made sure Cornelius heard the gospel. And Cornelius was called and saved through the preaching of the gospel. He was as Paul says in this verse, **"sanctified through the Spirit and the belief of the truth."**

Did **all** the Roman soldiers who heard the gospel respond the way Cornelius did? Don't you know there were plenty of them who heard the gospel, especially when Paul was under "house arrest" and chained to them twenty-four hours a day? They weren't all saved, but they were all "called."

"Many are called, but few are chosen."

When Paul preached in Thessalonica, the "call" went out to the entire city...but only those who believed were "chosen."

Verse 15...

Paul had told them of a future rebellion against the truth in the first part of this chapter, but Paul tells them here there is a present danger. Paul exhorts them to stand firm and hold to what they've been taught.

Have you all seen the commercial where the man is on the Internet and he gets the message that he has reached the end of it? He goes into the living room and his wife says, "I thought you were on the Internet." And he says, "I finished it." We all know we would be at the computer a long, long, long time before we ever "finished" the Internet!

And we will never ever exhaust God's Word. We should learn more and more and more truth each and every day...and we should be in the business of sharing it with those around us!! But, we can spend our life in the Word of God and it is still new and fresh to us every day and speaks to our every need.

Verses 16-17...

Paul ends this portion of Scripture with a precious benediction. And in this short benediction Paul reaffirms some significant truths.

- 1) Paul's words united the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father in such a way that he affirmed the **deity of Christ**.
- 2) Paul also affirmed to us again that **God loves and gives us**

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comfort and hope by grace.

3) Paul affirms that our walk and our talk must agree.

Paul was concerned about their **saying** and their **doing**. If our walk contradicts our words, we lose our testimony, don't we?

Remember, you are part of a family...you are beloved by God...you are chosen...and you are called!