# A Promise to Grow

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

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*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “A Promise to Grow.”

**Stand Firm! Hold On!**

‘Stand firm and hold on tight.’ When did you last hear those words?

On an airport bus, perhaps, taking you from the terminal building to the plane. On a boat ferrying passengers across a busy river. On a narrow mountain ledge when a sudden storm sweeps by. At a time of movement and danger, a time when something is about to happen which might cause injury or even death. Plant both feet as solidly as you can, take hold of the safety-rope or anything else you may be able to hang on to, and brace yourself for the shock.

That is precisely the position Paul is recommending to the young church. There are troubled times on the way, and like a small boat crossing a turbulent waterway the little ship of the church is going to be tossed to and fro. When that’s happening, they need to know how to stand upright and what to hold on to. Here Paul is quite clear: the safety-rope consists of ‘the traditions you were taught’, that is, the foundational Christian teachings which he gave them when he was with them, and then by letter.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**2 Thessalonians 2:13-16**, “But we ought always to give thanks to **God** for you, brothers beloved by the **Lord**, because God **chose** you as the firstfruits to be saved, through **sanctification** by the **Spirit** and **belief** in the truth.**14**To this he **called** you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the **glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ. **15**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.

**16**Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,**17**comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

God’s Plan for you is to grow in Christ. Here we have his plan laid out. This is a plan carried out by the Trinity.

**Triune Sanctification**

St. Ambrose: “So, then, the Father sanctifies, the Son also sanctifies, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies; but the sanctification is one.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Give thanks for the **Work** of Salvation(2 Thess. 2:13-14)
2. **GIVE THANKS TO THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION**

Why does a person give thanks? Because God did it all in His triune nature. The Father planned it, the Son paid for it, and the Promised Spirit carries it out and performs it.

**2 Thessalonians 2:13-14**, “But we ought always to give thanks to **God** for you, brothers beloved by the **Lord**, because God **chose** you as the firstfruits to be saved, through **sanctification** by the **Spirit** and **belief** in the truth.**14**To this he **called** you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the **glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**A Fear of Losing Salvation**

Paul writes fear of the future is to understand the great doctrine of salvation. the Thessalonians did not need to fear they had lost or could lose their salvation, because God’s choice of them is irrevocable. Salvation began with God’s loving choice in eternity past and will continue until glorification in the future.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Rom. 8:29–30**, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **29**For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30**And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

What Does a Full Salvation Look Like?

We seem to view our salvation as one dimensional. To be saved is simply to be forgiven. When the Bible speaks of salvation it certainly encompasses that, but it is so much more than that. The easiest way to look at it is from the vantage point of time: past, present, and future.

Salvation is a threefold work in us. We have been justified. We have been declared righteous before God based on our complete dependance upon the righteousness and work of Christ on the Cross. But we are being sanctified, and one day He will glorify us in a sinlessly perfect body with our natures perfectly conformed to Christ (Rom. 8:28-30). In salvation God not only saves us from the *penalty* of our past sin, He is delivering us from the *power* of the present temptation to sin, and one day on the day of redemption, we will be delivered from the very *presence* of sin altogether. God will complete His work in you!

The following chart should help in visualizing exactly what Christ has promised to do with all believers.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PAST  (Our Position) | PRESENT  (Our Practice) | FUTURE  (Our Promise) |
| ***Election/***  ***Foreknowledge*** |  |  |
| ***Calling*** (drawing, conviction) |  |  |
| ***Regeneration - Conversion***  (faith / repentance) | ***Sanctification***  (being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ)    In sanctification the believer continues repenting and believing… | ***Glorification*** (Final redemption which will occur at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. The present body of each believer will be changed to a new body incapable of sinning.) |
| ***Justification*** (declared righteous—imputation occurs—my rags for Christ’s righteousness)    ***Adoption*** (given all the rights and privileges of a true child) |  |  |

Christ promises to accomplish all of the above, not only justification but also sanctification and glorification. Let us define all the above terms so we see the glory of what Christ promises to accomplish.

**B. GIVE THANKS FOR THE WORK OF SALVATION**

1. **Election**

God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4); He “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim. 1:9). The redeemed are those whose names were “written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Rev. 13:8; cf. 17:8).

The New Testament commonly refers to believers as the “elect” (Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Rom. 8:33) or the “chosen” (Matt. 22:14; Rom. 11:7; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).

**The Benefits of Election**

The doctrine of God’s sovereign, elective love has several practical benefits.

* It crushes human pride (Titus 3:5), since God gets all the credit for salvation.
* It exalts God (Ps. 115:1), as He receives praise for His love.
* It produces joy (1 Peter 1:1–2, 6, 8), as believers rejoice in their salvation.
* It grants unimaginable privileges (Eph. 1:3).
* It promotes holiness in the lives of the elect (Col. 3:12–13).
* Finally, and most relevant to Paul’s purpose in this passage, it provides security (Phil. 1:6).[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Salvation at a Certain Point in Time**

**A Decision.** Most of us go back as far as the decision we made for Christ at a certain point in time. That’s natural and valid and important. All that you have in Christ was made real to you on the day you were converted. Your heart became aflame for God—your eyes were opened. You repented of your sins. That’s what we first remember—experiencing the blessings of our new spiritual birth.

**Before Your Birth.** But our salvation was planned long before we made any decision for Christ. If you want to understand what has happened to you, you need to go farther back—back before you were born—before your *parents’* birth.

**Before the Cross.** Others go back to the cross. And it is true. We were all saved at the cross. Abraham was saved, David was saved. You and I were saved at the cross. But we must go farther back. We were chosen before the **Cross**, before the fall, before the angels!

**Before Creation.** You’ve got to go to the *creation* itself, and then you’ve got to go before that. We’ve got to go so far back. Back when there was nothing but God Himself! And God has always been. And in that time when there was nothing but God, nothing but the fellowship between God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Back then, God chose us. Do we realize that our salvation was planned before even the world was planned?

* **Jeremiah 31:3**, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”
* **1 John 4:19** (KJV), “We love him, because he first loved us.”
* **Jeremiah 1:5**, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

**Election is Offensive**

Romans 9:16-23, “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! **15**For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”**16**So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”

**19**You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” **20**But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” **21**Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? **22**What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23**in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.”

1. **Sanctification**

Paul continues to reveal the way of salvation, saying that God chose them ‘for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit’ (v. 13).

Election does not save the sinner, as it is merely a divinely allotted step in the way to forgiveness.

It is by righteousness imputed (justification) and righteousness imparted (sanctification) that the sinner is saved. This act of sanctification flows from the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and sets apart the sinner to needed repentance and faith (Ezek. 36:26; John 3:3; Titus 3:5).[[5]](#footnote-5)

The **sanctification** that begins at regeneration does not, of course, mean that believers do not sin. But it does ensure that those set apart from sin to God will lead lives of progressive sanctification, of increasing holiness toward Christlikeness (John 17:17; Rom. 6:1–22; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16–25; Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:9–20; 1 Thess. 4:3–4; 5:23; 1 Peter 1:14–16; 1 John 3:4–10).[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Phil 2:12-13**, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **13**for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

1. **Justification**

Paul now mentions ‘truth’. Jesus is the Way the Truth and the life.

When the gospel truth of Christ crucified and risen on the third day is believed, sinners are declared righteous before God and by this they are justified. Faith brings them into a right and good standing with God, whose laws they have broken.

To be justified is to be “declared righteous” before God a just and holy God. It is utterly based on Christ’s satisfaction of God’s wrath on the Cross plus nothing else (i.e. propitiation—Rom. 3:25; cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). Justification in Christ allows God who is utterly holy and righteous to remain so by meting out justice upon Christ in in the guilty sinner’s place. God remains “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). This justification is appropriated by faith alone. It is clear that “a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ … because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16). We are never accepted in our own works, which are “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), but through God’s free gift of Christ we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

Now, in Christ, we are accepted, forgiven and granted peace with God. Paul teaches clearly in the epistle to the Romans that salvation is by faith alone through grace alone, not by keeping the law (Rom. 1:17; 3:10–21; 4:3; 5:1; 10:4; compare Gal. 3:22–26; Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 3:9).[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. **Calling**

‘Election’ is an *objective* reality: it is God making a choice, and God’s will is what matters. Election is his sovereign act in eternity past. ‘Calling’ is a *subjective* reality: it is personal; we respond to it and we hear it. It comes when we hear the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jonah 2:9; 2 Peter 1:10). When the elect hear the gospel, it is accompanied with God’s grace to bring them to conversion. Election says that we are chosen in Christ from before the beginning of the world (Eph. 1:4); effectual calling, therefore, is the grace and power of God irresistibly drawing sinners to Christ (Rom. 8:30).

These are not abstract ideas; rather, they are very glorious and practical. There are two types of call found in the New Testament: the universal call and the effectual call. The truth of the universal call was demonstrated when the Saviour said, ‘For many are called, but few are chosen’ (Matt. 22:14). The effectual call comprise six things:

* a summons (to the elect sinner) into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:26–27)
* a call out of darkness into God’s light, new nationhood and special sonship (1 Peter 2:9–10)
* a call into eternal life (Heb. 3:1)
* a call to the ‘fight of faith’ (1 Tim. 6:12)
* a call to holiness (1 Thes. 4:7)
* a call to glorification (1 Peter 5:10; Rev. 19:9).

This powerful calling is the first initiatory act in the *ordo salutis*; by it we are summoned to faith in Christ and to repentance of our sins.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. **Glorification**

Glorification refers to our final redemption when God gives us a new body that has no sinful desires. He “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). God will bring us finally into His presence, and He shall be our God and we shall be His people (Revelation 21:3). Christ promises to the one He elects and draws to Himself to “*raise him up on the last day*” (Jn. 6:40, 44, 54). This last day refers to the consummation of history when Christ appears in the clouds to bring home His bride and destroy the sin-cursed world to create new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:9-13). There will come a day when we no longer say with Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death*?”* (Rom. 7:24). “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Pet. 3:10). At that moment, Christians everywhere will put off this sinful corpse of flesh that we have inherited from our father Adam, and we will put on a glorified body like our risen Saviour. In that day sin will have no more power over us. The power and the presence of sin will be completely eradicated! God will join our soul with a perfect glorified body on that Last Day “*to be like his glorious body*” (Phil. 3:21), and we will have final redemption.

The Apostles spoke of this often. John said we would be like Jesus. Listen to him:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2).

Paul said the same thing in 1 Cor. 15:51-54:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.*”*

The church has no splendour or beauty other than in its union with Jesus Christ. With him as its King, it will share in the glory of heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7–9).[[9]](#footnote-9)

One day Christ will come and redeem this sinful body of ours and give us a new body, and we will sin no more! It could happen any moment. Look to the sky—“*raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*” (Luke 21:28).

1. Give thanks for the **Word** of Salvation(2 Thess. 2:15)

**Holding to God’s Word**

The only effective means by which to confront error is to “stand firm” and “hold to” the truth. To have this kind of tenacity and resolve against the strong winds of false teaching requires believers to know both what they believe and why they believe it. Paul speaks of the Thessalonians holding to the God’s Word.

**2 Thessalonians 2:15**, “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.”

**Tradition**

The Greek word translated **traditions** literally means “things handed down” and refers here to divine revelation (cf. 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2), **whether** given **by word of mouth or by letter.** The Thessalonians were to hold fast to what God had handed down, both orally and in writing, through Paul and the other apostles. Believers must hold fast to the “faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3; cf. 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14).[[10]](#footnote-10)

**The Bible is the Revelation of God in Christ**

Christ is the ultimate and last Word - expression of the Father.

**Heb 1:1-2**, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son…”

Christ is the “He is the exact image of the invisible God” (**Col. 1:15**).

**John 1:18**, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.” Christ has perfectly exegeted God the Father.

Jesus said this in **John 5:39-40**, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

The doctrine of Sola Scriptura is all about Christ. People who deny sola Scriptura usually do so because they do not want to follow Christ, so they “refuse to come.”

**Sufficiency of God’s Word**

It is sufficient to save me and conform me to the image of Jesus Christ. The Bible does not have all the knowledge about everything, but it is “**able to make you wise for salvation** through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

The Bible is God’s self-revelation. It tells me everything I need to know about God’s mercy and love in Christ to be saved, and everything I need to know about my depravity and rebellion against God so that I feel my need of Christ and turn to Him in repentant faith.

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ”

Jesus said “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63)

The Psalmist said: “Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a Light unto my path”

We are called Chicago Reformed Seminary. We are always reforming and examining our lives by the standard of Scripture. Reform meant to those in the 16th century of whom it is used, means to return to the standard of Scripture. Growing and changing in Christ is possible only by an intense diet of the Word of God

**Without Sola Scriptura We Have No Sure Word of Prophecy**

Greater than even a prophet who speaks directly from God, we have “a more sure word of Prophecy” found in the pages of written Scripture (**2 Peter 1:18**). Scripture tells us who Christ is, who God is... Not the watchtower magazine, not the pope, not the book of Mormon, nor the prophecies of Ellen White or the charismatic rantings of Benny Hinn.

**God’s Word alone is Sufficient to Sanctify Me**

The renewal of the mind with the Word is the ultimate solution for lust, anger, depression, and pride. Unless we subject ourselves to the Word and not emotion or circumstances we cannot change.

**Subjective vs Objective faith**

Only the Word of God should guide us. All other authorities are shifting sand. Jesus says we must build our house upon the Rock of His Word.

No subjective guide should guide us. Feelings or Circumstances or Popes ought not guide or control us. “We think with our feelings,” Sinclair Ferguson has said.  It’s true.  We allow our feelings to guide our thinking and we shouldn’t.  Emotions are a wonderful gift from God.  And our relationship with God should bring to our lives strong godly affections.  However, our emotions shouldn’t be vested with final authority.  This should be reserved for God’s Word alone.

**Paul’s Objective Faith in the God-Breathed Word**

**2 Timothy 3:14-17**, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it **15**and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the **sacred writings**, which are **able to make you wise for salvation** through faith in Christ Jesus. **16**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17**that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Sola scriptura speaks of:

* **Perspicuity** - it's understandable to the common person

One bishop named John Bell told Tyndale that it would be better for the people to be without God’s law, as long as they had the pope’s law. This was Tyndale’s famous response: "I defy the pope and his laws! If God spares my life, in a few years a plow boy shall know more of the Scriptures than you do."

1. Give thanks for the **Comfort** of Salvation(2 Thess. 2:16-17)

**2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,**17**comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

**Loved Eternally**

Jesus and the Father **loved** believers from all eternity. Because of that love, which permanently and irrevocably granted believers **eternal comfort and good hope by grace** at salvation, the apostle prayed that both **Jesus Christ** and **God** the **Father** would **comfort and strengthen** the Thessalonians’ **hearts in every good work and word** by this unshakable promise of future glory.

As they anticipate the return of Jesus Christ for His own, believers must not be deceived, forgetful, ignorant, unbelieving, insecure, or weak. They will not experience the terrible judgment of the Day of the Lord, because their salvation is secure. God loved them, chose them, redeemed them, and would glorify them. They must therefore be strong and courageous, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13).[[11]](#footnote-11)

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2. Gorday, P. (2000). *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (p. 115). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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5. McNaughton, I. (2008). *Opening up 2 Thessalonians* (pp. 55–56). Leominster: Day One Publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. MacArthur, 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. McNaughton, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. McNaughton, 56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. McNaughton, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. MacArthur, 288-289. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. MacArthur, 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)