

We are bounds to give thanks

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[0 : 00] 2 Thessalonians 2, reading again at verse 13. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to give thanks always to God for you. Now friends, it is a good thing to give thanks to God.

We must remember that only the Christian is able to give thanks to God for the blessings of this life, and even for the sorrows and difficulties of this life.

We must remember that men and women that have not God's saving grace never really thank God for anything.

They neither thank him for their existence, nor for their families, nor for their comforts, nor for their humblings. They do not thank him for the coming into the world of the Son of his love to die for us.

[1 : 34] The unbelieving man thanks God, I say, for nothing. But those who are converted should make it that daily and continual practice to be thankful to the Lord.

I'm going to ask you this question. Before you came to the church this morning, did you thank God for all that you have?

Did you come here this morning praising the Lord in your heart and in your soul for all that he has done for you in your life? Are you an appreciative person, a grateful person?

Well, this is what we learn here from the practice of the Apostle Paul. We are bound to give thanks always to God for you.

What he means is, it's our duty to do this. It's laid upon us by God to be thankful. And he's particularly thankful for these persons in the church of Thessalonica.

[2 : 47] He thanks God for their spiritual life. He thanks God for what they are. Now there's, above all, something we should be thankful for.

No matter how lonely you are today in this world, you're not the only pilgrim traveling the path of life. You should be so thankful that there are others here in this place and the multitudes throughout the world.

And they also are treading the pilgrim path. Now what had happened, of course, was that Paul, on the course of one of his journeys, had come to this Greek town of Thessalonica, right up in the north of the country, north of where the Olympic Games used to be celebrated in Greek times, to use a contemporary reference.

And here he had preached, and here these people had believed in the Savior. He the men and women, they had turned from their idols to serve the living God.

They had turned their backs upon the pleasures of life, its filthiness, and its philosophies, and they had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 07] From being sunk in the mire of depravity, these men and women of Thessalonica had come to believe in the great truth of the word of the living God.

And now their life was transformed. And they were waiting for the coming of the Lord again. And they were humbly pursuing their responsibilities in this life.

Although, of course, in some cases, they had to be rebuked. You may know that in this third chapter of this epistle, some of these Christians were not working as they should have been. They were just so much waiting for the second coming of Christ that they were not doing their duty from day to day.

They were sitting down and had to be corrected and rebuked. Just as I heard yesterday that there was some American evangelist in the southern states of America who was telling the people, who was telling the people just ten days ago that the end of the world was to come.

At the end of September. September the 25th or something. And he said, no, that will be today. A few days before that, at any rate, he said the end of the world would come.

[5 : 14] And he said that you must all be preparing for that day. No need to get jobs. There's no need to be working anymore. Just wait. The Lord will be coming at two o'clock or something in the afternoon.

Didn't happen. So he was interviewed and asked why it didn't happen. And he said, well, I must have got something wrong in my calculations. He's coming instead, he said, early in October.

Around about the third of October. So you've got ten more days in which to preach to the unconverted. That sort of fanaticism and nonsense existed in the early church. And in this very letter, Paul has to correct this and tell these Christians, you're not to be thinking like that.

We don't know when the day will come. But it will come. But he's thankful to God that they are believers, brethren, beloved of the Lord.

And we should thank God for every true believer in our experience. We should be thankful for everyone in this building who truly loves God.

[6 : 19] We should be more thankful that we have brethren and friends in this life who understand how we feel when we talk about our loneliness as a people of God.

The unsympathetic attitude of men that we work with. They have not the slightest interest in things to do with the Spirit of God. They are not looking for the coming of the Lord.

They are looking for Friday night when they can enjoy themselves and glut their belly with the lusts of this life. And Paul writes this letter and he said, I thank God.

I am bound to thank God, beloved brethren, because out of this dark world you have believed the truth that I have preached. Now today I want us to see two aspects of Paul's thankfulness for these believers in Thessalonica.

And the first is a negative and the second a positive aspect of his thankfulness. In other words, first of all I want to show you Paul is thankful for these Christians for what they were not.

[7 : 31] And then secondly for what they were. Now I'll show you how this works. Verse 13, which is our text, begins with a very important little word.

You know, every word of the Bible is important. We mustn't overlook little words. And this verse 13 begins with a little word but. There's a lot attached to that little word but here.

Why is it so important? Well because it is a contrast with what he has just been saying. It's the contrast with what has just gone before.

I don't know if you were noticing in the reading as we had it here, but in verse 7 and following, Paul here is talking about a very vital and not very easy subject.

And yet he doesn't hesitate to tell them about this. Notice what he says in verse 7. The mystery of iniquity doth already work. Now he is talking about something very terrible which would happen in the Christian church in days to come.

[8 : 44] You see, these Thessalonians needed to be corrected in their views of the second coming of Christ. I've said that already. There were certain things about the second coming of Christ that they had not understood.

And as I've explained, some of them weren't working. They were just sitting at home and saying to themselves, well Christ could come at any moment, what's the point of getting a job? What's the point of doing our daily duties?

What's the point of buying a new suit of clothes if the old one wears out? What's the point of putting more food in the coven for the children? Christ could come at any minute. No point in doing that. Now that was an extreme and a fanatical thing which they should not have been thinking.

So Paul rather is telling them here in this chapter about a certain thing which must happen before Christ returns. He said something must happen within the Christian church before Christ returns.

What's that? It's this mystery of iniquity. And he is thankful that they are not caught up in it as others were going to be. Now let's have a look at this mystery of iniquity because it is the reason really why Paul is so thankful that these people were believers.

[10 : 00] But in verse 4 he says this mystery of iniquity refers to a strange person who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God all that is worshipped so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God.

Now this is a very terrible figure says Paul who is going to arise in the course of the history of the church. When you Thessalonians are dead and other Christians shall come in called by God as you have been through the gospel there is going to occur in the church a mysterious form of evil because that's what iniquity is.

And there is going to arise a figure a personality in the church which claims to be sitting in the very temple of God and showing himself that he is God opposing himself above and against God or all that is worshipped.

Now we refer to this figure as the man of sin but also we refer to him as the Antichrist.

Now there are many Antichrists in the church. Everybody who teaches serious error and deviation from the truth is an Antichrist so that Jehovah's Witnesses are Antichrist and Mormons are Antichrist and those who deny the authority of scripture and deny the divinity of Christ.

[11 : 43] They are Antichrists in the plural. But here we have the Antichrist the great historical figure who God said as the mystery of iniquity would one day arise within the Christian church and would oppose everything the gospel stands for exalting himself above the very throne of God and claiming to be God incarnated upon earth.

And that is why we call him the Antichrist because the word anti or anti is a Greek word meaning in the place of or a substitute for.

And the Antichrist gets his name because it means some figure who is a mere man was going to arise in the course of human history and was going to take the place of Christ.

He was going to usurp Christ's authority and Christ's power and Christ's prestige and Christ's influence in the church and amongst men. And that is why he is called here his mystery of iniquity.

And Paul is saying my brethren there's no need to imagine that Christ is going to come this afternoon at two o'clock or three. He will not come says Paul until this mystery of iniquity has first of all been revealed in the world and in the church.

[13 : 02] This mystery of iniquity has got to occur. There's got to be a falling away from God and an apostasy from God before the second coming of Christ. Now I want you to investigate with me what is this mystery of iniquity?

Have we any evidence and clue as to what this is going to be? And I point you here to two verses in chapter two. Verse seven and verse eight.

For the mystery of iniquity says Paul doth already work. Only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way and then shall that wicked be revealed whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Now there are two points I want us all to see in those verses. Two points. First of all I want us to see that the mystery of iniquity, whatever it is or would be, was something which had begun on a very small scale even in Paul's lifetime.

Now that is very clear from what he says there in verse 8 because he says verse 7 rather, the mystery of iniquity doth already work. There was already the beginnings of this iniquitous power which was going to like a snowball, increase in size and multiply in its hideous offensiveness to God.

[14 : 41] It was beginning, says Paul, already. Even whilst the apostles of Christ were on earth, this mystery was beginning, this evil was beginning to foment and ferment and multiply and grow like leaven until it would damage the church.

But it was not yet full grown. It was not yet revealed. That's the point. And so he says, he who now lets or hinders, the word let means the word to hinder.

there is something hindering its full revelation. What is that? Well, something was alive and something was in being in Paul's day which prevented the full revelation of this mystery of iniquity which was beginning to work.

And this was the Roman Empire. You see, the Roman Empire was such a mighty hand, such a male fist of power. It would not tolerate a second major world power.

But, says Paul, once the Roman Empire has been removed, then shall this mystery be revealed in all its fullness.

[15 : 59] And that's what he's talking about here in this verse. He who now lets, that's the Roman Empire, will continue to do so until he's taken out of the way.

Now that occurred in the 5th century AD. And then the second thing I want you to see in verse 8 is, then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Now what is this? Now the point here to see is that this mystery of wickedness was going to go on and to grow and to multiply in the world until the Lord Jesus Christ would return.

It's on the return of Christ and only then that this mystery would be destroyed forever. So in other words, says Paul, it's already beginning to grow.

Once the Roman Empire is destroyed, it will suddenly become clear to all mankind that it's there working powerfully as a major world force to do evil in the world.

[17 : 08] and then only when Christ returns will it be destroyed. Now then, you and I are called upon to try to look at what this could be.

It is our duty to try to find out what Paul is referring to. And he refers here to at least three forms of wickedness which this force of evil was going to commit.

The first one is it was going to replace the authority of God by the authority of man. That's the first feature of this iniquitous form of evil within the church.

God's authority would be cast out within the church and replaced by human authority. authority. And the next thing is that the headship of Christ over his church would be replaced by the headship of man within the church.

And the third thing is that Christ's great work for sinners would be replaced by the work of human philosophy and what men would teach in its step.

[18 : 30] it is because of this passage and similar passages that the Westminster Confession of Faith which we have signed as elders and ministers in this church have recognized here a description of Roman Catholicism.

Now Roman Catholicism fits in exactly with what we have in this passage. it substitutes the word of God by the authority of the Pope and of the church.

It substitutes the headship of Christ over the church for the headship of a man at Rome. It substitutes the one death of Christ upon the cross for sinners by what the priest offers up every day or every week upon the so-called altar in the blasphemy of the mass.

And it does many other things to deceive sinners. Now I want you to see how cunning and how crafty is its work. If you look now at verses 9 and 10.

Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved.

[19 : 59] Now here we have a description of the power which is inspiring this corruption within the church. His coming says Paul is after the working of Satan.

Here is Satan right in the church. Here is Satan powerfully at work in the church. Here is Satan showing signs and wonders in the church which will deceive men.

with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. And this says Paul is something which in history is going to occur in the church.

Now friends this is exactly what has happened in the church. No sooner did the Roman Empire collapse in 410 AD than immediately this papal power began to rise in the world.

It is a matter of fact. It is a matter of history. It is a matter of studying the facts of the history of the church and of the world. And during the Middle Ages the great power in Europe was the power of the church.

[21 : 04] Those who were high in ecclesiastical office had the power to throw men into prison where they would rot in dungeons. Those who had ecclesiastical power could shut the kingdom of heaven against men so they claimed so that no one could get to heaven except on their say so.

And everyone would go to hell unless their kindness opened the door for them. And priests from that day to this can shut the door of life from men they claim simply because they refused the authority of the Pope and the papacy and the corruptions of their church.

Now I want to add something to that and to say this. In the churches of the world today the great problem is that Protestantism is crumbling and is collapsing.

And we are finding today that the tendency of all the churches in the world is to drift into an alliance with the corruptions of the papacy.

This is something which is happening all over our country today. It's happening in the Church of England. It's happening in the Church of Scotland. And it's being done through the ecumenical movement whereby ministers and elders and office bearers and church leaders are more and more weakening in their attitude towards Catholicism and the papacy.

[22 : 27] And we now have leaders in the churches admitting that we must have a world church and it must be a church under the Pope as the head. Now why do people think like that in view of the reformation?

Because they know very well that Luther and Calvin and Wycliffe and Knox clearly and from scripture showed that papal religion is the antichrist of scripture.

How then are people so blind? How do they forget these ancient truths? Well the explanation of that is to be found in verse 10 and verse 11.

With all deceivables of unrighteousness in them that perish because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie.

I want you to see that. Why is it that people opt for corrupt religion and a corrupt church and a false gospel and do so willingly and deliberately forgetful of their history?

[23 : 47] It is says Paul because God has given them over to it and God gives men over to that when they cease to love the truth.

Now there's only a fine line between the collapse of the church of Christ in our country and it's being taken over by this great mammoth world church of corruption.

The question is will Christians of this generation continue to love the truth or will they decline into a state in which they're apathetical and become dead to it?

It's a great question. I'm not sure myself whether God is going to allow Christianity in this country to collapse altogether and whether we will cease to be a Christian country in any sense of the word.

Evangelical people in England and elsewhere, they're becoming so careless in their attitude to the things of God. They're so thoughtless about doctrine, so indifferent to the Bible, so prayerless, so careless in their neglect of the things of God, so shoddy and haphazard in their attendance of the house of God, that is a very great question whether God is slowly giving us over to the lust of our own hearts so that men will be sunk into this ancient morass of superstition again.

[25 : 15] You know, every time the Pope goes to a certain country, the first thing he does to that country is kneel down and kiss the soil. What does that mean? He means this country belongs to the papacy because I am the king of the universe.

I sit in the seat of God. That's what he thinks about it. He kisses the soil which is my own, he says. This country is my own. He claims it by the kiss to be his own possession.

And you see, that is the mentality which is being allowed by leaders in the world today. Now, do you love the truth?

If you are careless about the things of God, if you will live for the things of this life and not for God, the great danger is that God will give you over to this lie.

Catholicism is that cursed thing to which God gives men over when they cease to love Christ and his truth. When they become cold and dead and half-hearted, God will give them over to this ancient lie.

[26 : 23] That's what Paul teaches here. That they all might be damned because they had no pleasure in the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. thanks. Now, there's the first ground of thanksgiving that Paul gives.

He thanks God that these Thessalonians were not in that condition. He thanks God that they had not been given over to those lusts and to those sins.

Now, let me turn in my remaining time briefly to the positive aspect, what God does, what Paul does thank God for in connection with these men at Thessalonica. here he puts it like this.

I'm looking now at chapter 2. We are bound to give thanks all the way to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because, first of all, God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.

Now, there's the first thing. He thanks them that God has chosen them to salvation. notice he doesn't thank them that they became believers.

[27 : 35] Now, if he lived in the 20th century in some Christian churches, in some circles, Paul wouldn't talk like that. According to the thinking of some leaders today, Paul would have said, thank you for coming forward and making your decision.

Thank you for putting your hand up for Jesus. Thank you for signing the decision card at the meeting. That's the way some writers today would speak if they had been in Paul's position.

Paul doesn't do that. He thanks them that God has chosen them, that God has elected them, that God from the foundation of the world has put their names into his book.

Are you thankful for that as a Christian today? Do you see it? Do you believe in election? Do you believe that God is the one who appointed you to salvation? Do you understand that you would never have come to Christ had God not chosen you?

And are you thankful for that today? Whatever your problems and difficulties in life, are you thankful that God Almighty has appointed you to salvation?

[28 : 43] How has he done it? Well, Paul comes on to that. He mentions the agent through sanctification of the Spirit. Now the Spirit, of course, is the great one who broods over the souls of believers of their conversion.

Conversion is an act of God's power. It is God's Spirit operating on our spirit. Do you remember the hurricane a few days ago that we have all heard about in the Caribbean, this enormous force of power pressing upon the earth and upon the land and upon the sea, creating great devastation?

Now that is God's power in the wind. But God's power in conversion is far greater than that hurricane. God's power in conversion is the action of omnipotent power upon the human will and the human spirit.

God's infinite creative power moves upon the spirit of the sinful man and we are made willing against our will and made to will what God wills.

He breaks down our unwillingness to come. We are sanctified by the spirit. We are made holy by the spirit. Our own will is broken to repentance.

[29 : 59] That's why the sinner who is truly brought to Christ, he cannot live sin anymore. He cannot love the theatre and the dance and the disco and the old way of life because he's a holy man.

He is sanctified by the spirit of God. And if a person thinks themselves to be a Christian and their will has never been broken and their nature sanctified, they are deceived.

They are not Christians because everyone whom God saves he does so by this holy process. And what is the means whereby we are saved?

Well he says here through belief of the truth. Sanctification of the spirit is the agency, now the means is the belief of the truth.

They are brought to believe the truth. That is to say you can't be saved without the preacher, you can't be saved without the Bible, you can't be saved without hearing how to be saved.

[31 : 03] The belief of the truth, you can't be saved unless you believe the truth. Now friend, there's something for you here today if you're not a believer.

your problem is you don't believe the truth, do you? If you're honest with yourself, your real problem is you do not believe on this Christ.

You do not trust him with your life and your soul and your destiny. Well that's what you've got to do. You have to believe implicitly and wholly in this Christ.

Christ. Now then the next thing he talks about here is that they are called through the gospel. They are called by God through the gospel that they hear.

Now the calling of God is the voice of God. What is a call but a voice? And the voice of God speaks to us through his word and in the preaching.

[32 : 04] It is the voice of God which sinners hear when they hear God speaking to them personally. Now were you ever in a gospel meeting and you heard God's voice for you personally and you said to yourself that's just for me.

God knew that I needed that. That was for me. Well that is what God does in the preaching of his word to sinners whom he intends to save. They are called through the gospel.

They hear with their ears and in their soul they are aware that God is speaking a message to them. This has their name on it. God's voice is heard in the gospel.

Not simply the voice of some man be he eloquent or not. God's voice is heard. And then the fifth point he thanks God for in the positive aspect of this text is that they are called he says to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They are called on to go to heaven. They are called on to be with Christ and that he says is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 17] The glory that he has. The glory that he died to enter into. He has entered into his glory. And he will take his people with him into the glory. That is the blessed prospect of the Christian.

And you see therefore how from start to finish it is all of the grace of God. We cannot thank ourselves for our own participation in anything.

Do you believe? It is because of grace. Are you saved? It is because of his mercy. Are you hopeful of eternal life?

It is all through the calling of God. My beloved friend Paul thanks God for these Christians. And we should thank God for all Christians. We should thank God for the few Christians that there are in a town like air with whom we can have real fellowship.

The few in this part of the world who we have fellowship with. It doesn't matter whether there may be many or few. If they're the real thing, if they're the real believer, then we should thank God for them.

[34 : 24] Ten thousand hypocrites are nothing, but two real Christians are the precious possession of God. Now I close with these lessons very briefly.

First of all, if we do not know the truth and do not love the truth, we're at a great risk. Do we realize that? our generation is at great risk of being sucked into this great vacuum cleaner of false and corrupt religion which aligns itself with the Antichrist, which began in Paul's day and is now a huge world organization with a man at its head and with God denied and his truth denied at every single turn.

They're wracked with idolatry and superstition and corruption from head to foot. They deny Christ and they deny God in all the essential points of Christian truth and yet people walk into the net and are caught in the web of their superstition.

How does it happen? It is because they do not love the truth. So my brethren love the truth and walk in it and never depart from it not for any reason.

Don't envy the sinner. Don't envy the corrupt religions of this world but love the truth and never tire of hearing it.

[35 : 58] So as I close today I would say to you make sure that you have God for yourself and thank him for those who like you believe it and love it.