



Thoughts from Second Thessalonians ...

Stand Firm

The forces of darkness are strong, and the forces of delusion are subtle and confusing. The apostle Paul, for example, had mentioned information coming from "a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us." As soon as the early church came off the ground, the lying tongues began to imitate the apostles and their doctrines, but with Satanic twists that were totally destructive to the souls of men. These forces not only opposed the presentation of the gospel to the lost, but they tried to intimidate or discourage the saved and endeavored to obscure the message from God. One example of opposing the presentation of the gospel from the book of Acts is Elymas the magician in the presence of the proconsul Sergius Paulus, as Paul and Barnabas attempted to persuade the official concerning Jesus. Elymas, said Luke in the sacred writ, "was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith" (Acts 13:8). Inside the church, men created confusion by trying to bring the Law back into play. "Some men came down from Judea," Luke also recorded, and in regard to the fledgling congregation at Antioch, "and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1). They sounded authoritative, and, after all, they came from Jerusalem! Correspondingly, from the lawless side, Jude noted, "Certain persons have crept in unnoticed ... ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness" (Jude 1:4). Therefore the apostle Paul is exhorting the brethren in Thessalonica to keep the faith in the face of such opposition.

- ◆ **Their calling** — Only a small percentage of earth's population is sufficiently interested in the truth to become a part of what the word of God terms "the called." The way God calls, however, is not some voice in the night or some sign in the sky. God calls, in a very straightforward form, through the gospel. Those who obey the gospel are thus "the called," and everyone else is "the lost." "He called you through the gospel," says Paul to the brethren, "that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." But being part of *the called* initially is not enough. As Jesus put it, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). The saint has to persevere through the obstacles of Christian life, and keep his faith intact until the end. The words of Jesus to the church at Smyrna stand as a significant warning, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Thus Paul writes this exordium to the brethren in Thessalonica, "So then, brethren, stand firm ..." (2 Thessalonians 2:16). In this way they would carry out the parallel injunction of Peter: "Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Peter 1:10).
- ◆ **Hold to what you were taught** — With the winds of false doctrine lashing against them, and the mighty waters of confusion swirling about them, the brethren needed to keep their focus and remember what they were taught, or they would lose their salvation. "Stand firm," the apostle encourages, "and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." The *traditions* have to do with the doctrines and practices ordained of the Lord and passed on to the early church by the apostles; they are *not* the additional traditions added by uninspired men who came after, regardless of later contrary claims.

Another name for the whole of new covenant teaching is *the apostles' doctrine* (Acts 2:42). To deviate from the doctrines and practices clearly inculcated by the apostles (and the new covenant prophets, whose message was the same as and originated from the apostles) is to deviate from what the Lord Himself intended. False doctrine originates in the bowels of Satan's realm and leads to the eternal destruction of souls. It is not surprising, then, that Paul would so strongly encourage the brethren to stand firm and not to deviate from what he and the other inspired men delivered to them. And that message is just as true today. Do not deviate from the doctrines and clear practices of the church as revealed in the holy scriptures!

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