

**SERMON THEME: FACING THE END WITH SOBRIETY**

**SERMON TITLE: THE FAMILY OF GOD: STANDING FIRM, BY PR RUFUS CHAN**

**SERMON TEXT: 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-17 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>13</sup>But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup>For this purpose he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup>So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. <sup>16</sup>Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, <sup>17</sup>comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

### **PROLOGUE**

- Through this sermon theme, we learn of Paul's instructions and encouragement for us on living in these end times, as we bear the hope of Jesus in us.
  - As the family of God continues to endure assaults/slaps from the evil one, Paul calls on us to stand firm and hold fast.
  - We can expect these assaults/slaps to be intensified as we live through these end times.
  - Sometimes, the attacks/slaps take place so as to wake the church up from our passivity, to urge us on in our pro-activity in the faith and to face the end with sobriety.
- Today, we will see what the Thessalonians church has been slapped with and how it can apply to us.

### **A. MAN/TIME OF LAWLESSNESS**

- Use of "so then" ("therefore" in NKJV, NET) suggests that:
  - In order to understand what it means to "stand firm", we need to look at the preceding context, to understand:
    - What and who do we stand firm against?
    - Why is there a need to stand firm and hold fast?
- Context:
  - Church of Thessalonica is under great persecution, faced prevalent false teachings and deceitful spirits and suffered great confusion over knowledge of the end times and the Second Coming of Christ.
  - This led to Paul's emphasis on these issues to the Thessalonians (end times + Second Coming of Christ) and the dedicated teaching on "The Man of Lawlessness" in the opening of 2 Thessalonians.
    - Man of lawlessness: We do not know who it is, but we do know what he does.
- *We know with certainty that we are living in a time of lawlessness.*
  - Satan's way of making human buy into lawlessness is by deceptions and delusion. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)
  - Lawlessness works by
    - Constructing a belief system which ignores God's moral laws, thereby confusing and twisting the definition of good vs evil.
    - Introducing possibilities to confuse humanity.

- Example on news of mice created from 2 fathers – direct collision with God’s design of procreation, creating confusion towards LGBT discourse.
- *We need clarity ever more so in such times of great confusion and prevalent deception.*
- Paul’s words were not only for the early readers, but especially for us living in the end times to keep sober.
- Paul reminds us to “stand firm and hold fast to the traditions”.

## B. STAND FIRM AND HOLD FAST TO THE TRADITIONS (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

### 1. TRADITIONS

- The three traditions for us:
  - Gospel tradition: Concerning the central gospel message (1 Cor 15:1-3)
  - Church tradition: Information that shapes the practice of the congregations (1 Cor 11:23-25)
  - Ethical tradition: Dealing with proper Christian behaviour (1 Cor 7:10; 1 Thess 4:1-2)
- Paul’s focus in today’s text is on the Gospel tradition, reminding the believers that:
  - We have been saved to believe in the truth.
  - The truth = Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - Election comes with responsibility to stand firm in the truth, and to do whatever it takes to guard it against false teachings, unbelief, and prevalent culture.
- Root word of “Stand firm” in Greek = *stēkete* | *στήκετε* | pres act imperative.
  - It is a military term that Paul used much, and means to be stationary, firm or immovable.
    - It draws an image of being firmly planted in one’s faith, not being easily swayed/moved from the truth.
    - It implies a sense of resoluteness, determination, perseverance, in the face of challenges/trials.
    - Reference 1 Cor 16:13 – Draws an image of spiritual strength, courage and readiness to face spiritual warfare.
    - In Eph 6:13, Paul uses this term again, along with a full military armour, in parallel to spiritual armoury.
  - Paul used military terms as the people back then were familiar with the military terms.
  - This military act of standing firm suggests that we must maintain our ground in the face of imminent attacks, before making any offensive moves.
  - *If you want to attack the things of the world, you have to first sink your feet deep in the ground (i.e., Bible) in the following suggested ways.*

### 2. STAND FIRM

- We can **stand firm** by taking the following stance:
  - We must first be grounded in the word of God – Spend time reading and studying the Bible, so that we know and understand the truths in God’s word.
  - We must be ready to defend the word of God when confronted by false teachings and beliefs, and be able to identify the teachings that seek to dilute the word of God or omit certain aspects of the Christian faith.
    - Prosperity – Emphasis on material wealth/financial success as evidence of God’s blessing, often ignoring the need for spiritual growth, may downplay the importance of faith and obedience.

- Hyper Grace – Focuses on making people feel good and uplifted, without addressing the reality of sin and need for repentance, risks downplaying the importance of God’s judgement and consequences of sinful behaviour.
- Inclusive/Universalist – Teaches that everybody is saved, hence there is no need for moral standards, personal transformations and spiritual growth.
- Legalistic – Places strict adherence to religious rules and traditions over personal faith and relationship with God, possibility in downplaying the importance of grace and forgiveness.
- Moralistic – Emphasizes good works and morality as the path of salvation rather than faith in Christ, may downplay the importance of the cross and the need for repentance and forgiveness.
- Progressive – A contemporary movement that seeks to reform and update traditional Christian beliefs and practices, open to new ideas and perspective, has a strong commitment to social justice and inclusivity, willingness to engage with other faith traditions and secular culture.
- If we don’t know what we are believing in, we will be swayed left and right and cherry pick on the teachings of God.
  - Ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance when unsure.
  - Pray/Communicate frequently with God, so that we are able to recognize the voice of God.

### 3. HOLD FAST

- The act of standing firm *symbolizes a soldier*, charged to hold the ground, to withstand the attacks.
- The act of holding fast *symbolizes a conqueror*, to hold fast onto the victory of the conquest.
  - Christ has already conquered and won the victory for us.
  - We need only hold fast to what has already been won.
- The word “fast” = firm and secure, much like how the Lord has set the mountains securely in place (Psa 65:6).
  - Paul is telling us that we should stand firmly in truth, as like the mountains had stood firmly in their places.
  - This reminder holds true for the believers back then, as much as for us right now.
- To **hold fast**, we need a ‘book of convictions’.
  - Paul encourages the Thessalonians to stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that they were taught = teachings and lessons that are passed down from the apostles.
  - A book of conviction is a compilation of Biblical answers to the doubts and questions that the world has against Christianity, that must be kept and which allows us to articulate the biblical truths clearly when we are confronted.
  - We cannot be unclear about our apologetics; we are living in a time of accessible information.
  - We have the moral compass, and now we must take time and make the effort to calibrate it.

### 4. HOLY SPIRIT

- We need to rely on the Holy Spirit – the passage emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification.

- The Holy Spirit is our guide and counsellor, playing a crucial role in our spiritual growth and development.
- We must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit.
  - The Spirit's power helps us in our personal transformation to live a life that is pleasing to God, and to empower and enable us to endure the assaults we will face.
- *Knowledge is just part of the Christian experience, but the Holy Spirit gives us revelation, brings us to fullness and completes the Christian life.*
- *Even when we are armed with knowledge of the word, having a comprehensive set of conviction, sensitivity and acknowledgement to the Spirit's prompting, we sometimes lack the courage to act.*

### **CONCLUSION**

- Church history showed that throughout the centuries of cultural changes, enlightenment, societal movements, corruptions within the church, and intense persecutions, the Church has continued to stand (example of Felicitas' and Perpetua's unwavering faith in the face of deadly persecution).
- *Will you stand firm in your faith and hold fast on your traditions and convictions, as you live in the world today?*
  - The world will continue to change.
  - But when the church is built on the solid rock of God's word, we know through history, that the gates of hell shall not prevail.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How can we discern the difference between the truth and falsehood in a world full of deception and lies?
2. What role does the Holy Spirit play in sanctifying us and strengthening us in the faith, and how can we better rely on His guidance and empowerment?
3. What does it mean for you to stand firm in the faith in your current circumstances? What are some specific actions you can take to hold fast to the teachings you have received and rely on God's power in your daily life?
4. In what ways can we encourage and support our fellow believers to hold fast in their walk with Christ, and how can we strive to build up the body of Christ as a whole, as urged in 2 Thessalonians 2:17?