

2 Thessalonians 2:15-17 Stand firm in Christ, the King! Christ the King Sunday 11/25/2018

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father through Jesus Christ, our King. Amen.

God's Word to keep us firmly standing for His truth is written in 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17

These are Your words heavenly Father. Give us strength to stand in Your truth. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends in Christ, our Savior and King,

The Bible mentions several great leaders that God provided for His Old Testament people. He provided Joseph to be an official in Egypt so that his family was well fed and sheltered for 100's of years. Four hundred years later He provided Moses to lead the people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Later, He provided King David to fight in the Promised Land against the evil nations surrounding God's people so that they remained safe. He did all this in preparation for sending His Son through that nation. As great as the other leaders of God's people were, they cannot compare to Jesus, the Son of God and man, who won the victory to save us.

Stand firm in Christ, the King!

Forces are trying to make us fall! Paul wrote that we should "*stand firm*" (v.15). If you have ever swam in the ocean, you know that a large wave can knock you over unless you are prepared for it. So, in life, there are things that the devil and the evil world use against us to get us to fall from our secure place with Jesus. False teachers had claimed that if the Thessalonians would die before Jesus returned, their bodies would not go to heaven. How terrible for the believers who were near death! But, Paul wrote in his first letter that believers who died would be the first to rise from death and see Jesus; then living believers would follow.

Another thing they needed to stand against was the immoral lifestyle in their country. People were extremely selfish. They cared only about having pleasure in life. This created an atmosphere of ungodliness that was difficult to resist. As our country's culture goes further away from God's truth, so will its lifestyles. And because of our sinful natures, we will be tempted to go along with the crowd or at least not stand up against ungodly living. Also Paul described earlier in the chapter the spirit of anti-Christ. The word anti-Christ doesn't just mean to oppose Christ, but to replace salvation by grace through Christ with a teaching of self-works. The Bible warns, "*Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.*" (2 Peter 3:17) We must stand firm in the truth or we will lose it.

Secondly, let our faith reflect Christ's love. Christians shouldn't only be "the people who are against something." We are to offer good against evil. Paul wrote, "*May our Lord Jesus Christ... encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word*" (v.16, 17). God has called us to faith in Christ as our King to receive His blessings and to share the truth in word and action. This time of year with so many college football rivalries, I see school flags in neighborhoods and on cars. You don't have to guess what team a person stands for. As Christians dedicated to Christ our eternal King, we want everyone to know about Him. With our words we can describe His love that was so great He laid down His life to save us. We can show sympathy or comfort those who are sad and encourage people by our kindness. The Bible describes Tabitha as a woman who loved to do good. She sewed clothing and gave it away to the poor and helped anyone that she could. The people loved her so much that when she was ill, they urged Peter to travel from another city to help her.

Paul was thankful for the Thessalonians: "*We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). So, our faith in Christ will be seen by our words and actions. When we pray at a meal or read a Christian devotion around others, we are telling people that Jesus and His Word are important to us. We are living as God's people as much as we can in a sinful world. Our faith in Christ is part of who we are. We help others so that all may honor Jesus as the Savior. We do good works so that God will bring His blessing through us. Paul wrote, "*Therefore... stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Unfortunately, we're not perfect. We don't always stand against every sin or oppose the devil's temptations and we don't always let others know the positive difference that Christ makes in our lives. We are sinners who still sin just like all the other leaders in the past. We have not always warned others of spiritual dangers. We have not always fully prepared ourselves or others for Jesus' return and judgment.

Third, we need a strong grip on God's Word. We need His Word for direction and power to live by faith. Paul encouraged, *"Hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter"* (v.15). Did you ever try to hold too many things at once in your hands? Unless you're careful, something precious you were holding can drop and break. Paul was telling the Thessalonians to take a firm hold on God's Word. They were to listen to it, remember it, and fill their lives with it so that nothing could replace it. We need time in God's Word now before we face tough problems or hard temptations. Paul encouraged us in verse 13: *"From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth."* God loved you before creation. In eternity He chose you to be His own dear child in Christ purely by His grace. Then in time, He sent His Son, who constantly took a stand against evil. Jesus was always doing good, even healing His enemies like the soldier who was arresting Him in Gethsemane. He was willing to talk to anyone, no matter how bad their reputation or how self-righteous. There was no doubt by Jesus' words that people learned to know God the Father through Him!

Jesus didn't stop with talk. He loved people so much He gave up His life for them. The Bible states, *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:18) If Jesus sacrificed His life while we were against Him, how much more will He help us now that we are His brothers and sisters through faith in Him! How blessed we are to have such a great relationship with Jesus as our Savior. Most religions of the world are ruled by laws and fear of punishment. But, Christ has fulfilled God's law for us and has fully taken our punishment while on the cross so that we may joyfully be His in the world despite the power of sin. As Christians, we are confident about our future with Christ. Paul wrote, *"Our Lord Jesus Christ... loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope"* (v.16). We look to the future with confidence *"that [we] might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (v.14). Heaven is ours! It was won by Jesus for us and is a gift of His grace.

At death we will see our loving God face to face. Heaven will be opened and we will enter, awaiting the resurrection when we will receive our bodies made glorious. These are the truths of our loving God that we hold firmly. Paul wrote, *"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness"* (Colossians 2:6-7).

The Holy Spirit has worked through His Word and Sacraments to daily strengthen our faith. By God's grace alone, we stand firm against all opposition and stand for Christ in our words and actions. We joyfully live in the victory that Christ has won for us. We hold firmly to the saving faith that we have in Christ, our King! He will not disappoint us! A hymn states: *"By grace! This ground of faith is certain; So long as God is true, it stands. What saints have penned by inspiration, What in His Word our God commands, What our whole faith must rest upon, Is grace alone, grace in His Son"* (ELH 226 v. 5). Amen.