

The Essence and Effects of Unconditional Election

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
Preached on: Sunday, July 17, 2016

Well, it is my joy to once again minister the word of God to you and I would encourage you to take your Bibles, turn to 2 Thessalonians 2 and if you've not been with us, we go verse by verse through the various books that we study in an effort to squeeze out all of the goodness of every text of the word of God, and this morning we are going to be looking in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, that will be my primary text but I will be taking you into some other passages as well to help you understand which is the title of my discourse to you, "The Essence and Effects of Unconditional Election," a topic that many of my preacher friends have said they would never, ever preach from the pulpit lest they lose most of their church and hopefully that won't happen here but when we come to the word of God, we preach the whole counsel, we preach every verse and so we will examine this this morning. I might say from the outset that whenever you look at some of these great doctrines, especially the doctrine of unconditional sovereign election, we are always left speechless; we can never fully understand what God is up to in his plan of redemption. There is always this inscrutable mystery, as I like to call it, between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility and what we want to be very careful not to do is somehow twist the Scripture to make it appealing to our minds, to make palatable, but rather to preach whatever is before us in all of its glory and fullness. And, my, this has been a terrible month, hasn't it? There has been so many things. Every time you turn on the television, you're just kind of overwhelmed with the wickedness that's going on and there has just been so many things and so what a wonderful opportunity we have. I was thinking about this a minute ago as we were singing, again just a wonderful opportunity to do what we're commanded to do and that is to keep seeking the things above where Christ is; to set our minds on the things above, not on the things of this earth; to somehow transcend all of this chaos and confusion and focus on the glorious truths of our redemption and our inheritance.

So as we return to our study here of 2 Thessalonians, we're going to see the Apostle Paul speaking very practically, very clearly as a pastor, speaking to these dear saints who, you will recall, are very confused, they're even frightened. They've been deceived into believing that they were somehow living in that season of catastrophic divine judgment known as the day of the Lord. In order to refute such error, he has gone into great detail explaining how the rapture of the church must precede the final day of God's wrath, and the day of the Lord is not going to occur, he says, until the apostasy that is brought on by the man of lawlessness is revealed, referring to the antichrist. He has explained to them how the Holy Spirit is now restraining the full manifestation of the lawlessness that is already at work in the world, even in that day, and we see it in our day, and he explains the things that are going to happen when that restraint is lifted. And we've gone into great

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detail in past weeks looking at these things, and we see events today that we believe are harbingers of what is about to happen upon this earth.

But then as if to put a beautiful capstone on the monument of God's promises that he has revealed to them, he exhorts them now concerning the kind of proper heart attitude that they should have given all of their suffering, given their persecution, given the fact that they have been elected, they have been chosen by God. We're going to look at that today and then the next time we're together, we will look at what he goes on to encourage them with and that is the importance of just standing firm on the Gibraltar of divine revelation.

So let's look at what the Holy Spirit tells them through his inspired apostle beginning in verse 13,

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This would have been so encouraging, so instructive to those early saints who were enduring such enormous persecution and I might say to you, I don't know how many of you are enduring persecution right now for your faith, some of you I know are; I know a number of our listeners are. But whatever you're dealing with, know this for certain: the word of God is able to plow deep into the hard ground of our heart and allow the precious waters of his truth to nourish the seeds of our faith so that they can bear much fruit. So I want you to listen very closely, in fact, you will need to listen very closely because unlike many times when I preach to you, we will need to go into some rather deep theological considerations and even some church history to better understand what the word of God is telling us here today.

Now, as we come to this text, I believe Paul is speaking to them and to us concerning, once again, this unfathomable and irrevocable gift of salvation, just the eternal security of their salvation, and because of this, every believer needs to be characterized by two things and this is what we will focus on today: 1. a heart of humble gratitude; and 2. a heart of joyful anticipation.

Now, we need to put ourselves in the sandals of those early Thessalonian believers. Bear in mind that because of their faith in Christ, they were now being persecuted. Some of them had lost family members that had been beaten and even murdered. They were hated. They were mocked. Some had lost their job. Imagine what that would be like. Your family wants nothing to do with you. Most of your friends want nothing to do with you.

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Perhaps now you are homeless or you have a little home but you have no way of feeding your hungry children. You're feeling hopeless. And whenever we get in those types of situations, it's easy to begin to doubt the faithfulness of God and the goodness of God and even the word of God, and to begin to wonder, "God, have you forsaken me?" So the Apostle Paul understands all of this and he speaks to them as a pastor should and basically tells them, "No, God has not forsaken you. You are eternally secure in Christ."

So verse 13 he says, "we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." So by implication here, he is exhorting them to have 1. a heart of humble gratitude and, my, what marvelous truths to calm their fears and to comfort their souls. It's as if he's saying, "Believers, yes, I know you're struggling but I want you to rejoice because you are beloved by the Lord. You are loved by him. And do you know how you know? Because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." I mean, this is staggering. We read about this earlier in Ephesians 1:4, Paul says, "God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." And in Revelation 13:8, we read how that 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." And Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:9 that the Lord "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," literally before time began. He tells Titus in chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, he begins by speaking of himself as an "apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God," and at the end of verse 2, he speaks of how all of these things were "promised long ages ago." Again, before time began. This is amazing. I mean, your brain starts to explode when you start thinking of this. To think that before he even created us, he knew us. He set his love upon us in an effort to one day draw us unto himself, to save us, to transform us, so that we could reflect his glory.

So it's no wonder that Paul would exhort these sorrowful saints and tell them to give thanks to God for you, to talk about how they're "giving thanks to God for you." You are "beloved by the Lord because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." Folks, if there were no other text in all of Scripture to articulate the doctrine of unconditional election, this would be enough, but I would submit to you that there are many many others. Nevertheless, this whole concept of unconditional election, in other words, God's unmerited favor set upon those that he has chosen before time began, the very thought of that is so offensive to so many people. It may be offensive to you and I confess I don't fully understand it but I understand what God has said and I want to be faithful to the text, but because of our rabid commitment to self-determination, we tend to resent those doctrines that we don't fully understand and reject a God that we don't fully understand and begin to make him in our own image, one that we can manipulate; one

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that we can control; to come up with a God that will submit to our will rather than submitting to his will.

Now, how did this happen? How did all of this frustration and rancor develop? Well, let me give you a little historical perspective concerning the Protestant Reformation which, by the way, is about to celebrate its 500th anniversary this next year, and I might add that this is one of the most important events – you young people, please hear this – this is one of the most important events in the history of the world. I would also say that your public schools are not going to teach you this and I hope you that are home schooling your kids will teach them this. Let me tell you what was going on back then. In the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church basically dominated the world with its beliefs and its powers and during that time in 1302, Pope Boniface VIII issued a document called the Unam sanctam which stated that all people are subject to the Roman pontiff, including world rulers, and anyone who opposes the pope is subject to excommunication. A pretty powerful statement. And central to that declaration was the Roman Catholic doctrine that Christ in his death purchased a massive pool of merit that the church could dispense to its members via the sacraments and deceased saints and even martyrs would also contribute to this salvific or this redeeming reservoir. So bottom line, salvation was only available through the Catholic Church and this belief was summarized in the Latin phrase extra Ecclesiam nulla salus which means outside the church, no salvation.

Well, this heretical control was finally challenged in the early 16th century by a man named Martin Luther when he nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg door, thus launching the Protestant Reformation, and the five Solas of the Reformation that are beautifully displayed around this worship center really became the rallying cry of the saints of that age: salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, our authority is in Scripture alone, and all that we do is done for the glory of God alone. Now, I might add that literally millions of people have lost their lives down through history, especially during the time of the Reformation, because of these five Solas. Luther argued on the basis of Scripture that men were to go to Christ for forgiveness, not a priest, nor should men depend upon the church or sacraments. He also insisted that the idea of free will was a myth. The only thing man is free to do is to sin. He saw man's will being in total bondage to his sinful nature and therefore he wrote a book called "Bondage of the Will," which articulated man's utter inability to contribute to his salvation and his sheer hopelessness because of his depraved heart.

Well during that time, the Roman Catholics raised up their own champion to try to refute Luther's theology, especially the principles regarding man's depraved spiritually dead condition and Christ's unmerited favor because, again, they believed in grace plus works, faith plus works, Christ plus works, and so forth. Well, this man's name was Erasmus who ironically had written a book entitled "The Freedom of the Will," so you can see how the

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battle lines were kind of drawn back in those days. He believed that man's will was weakened but not extinguished. You might say he believed that man was sick spiritually but he wasn't dead and so man was therefore able on his own power to consider the claims of Christ and to make a conscious decision to receive Christ on his own power, and this is the same type of thinking that many evangelicals hold to today. The Gospel, as you probably are aware of, is often presented in such a way as to make it appear that God has really done all that he can do and now he's really helpless, the rest is up to you and he's hoping that we will do all that we can to get a person to make a decision for Christ, and God holds out the gift of salvation but the sinner must receive it. Election really has nothing to do with that. You've heard the analogy of, you know, it's like the poor sinner is flailing out there in the water and we're throwing them this life preserver of the Gospel and now it's up to you to grab and take it, but what we will see from Scripture is the reality is that person is not flailing in the water, that person is a spiritual corpse. He's unable to do anything unless God gives him life. And so this is where the battle lines are drawn. But you see many people today, you know, they will say, "You know, Jesus has done his part, now the rest is up to you," and essentially God has nothing to do with it from that point on.

Advocates of this position often cite John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." Well, that seems to pretty well settle the matter, however they ignore the rest of the verse and on into verse 13 that explains how that reception is made possible. He speaks of "those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Many passages speak to this. I'll give you but one other, Colossians 2:13, Paul says, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions."

Now, back to our history lesson. For the most part, Erasmus lost the argument in Europe. He lost the whole idea of conditional election. People continued to embrace what I believe the Bible teaches and the apostles taught, that of unconditional election. So you didn't see preachers running around asking sinners to walk aisles or to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior and so forth, they merely presented the Gospel in all of its glory and the Spirit of God would then do his regenerating work and people would be saved.

Now, let's fast forward 100 years and another theologian emerged who rejected the doctrine of unconditional election as well, his name was Jacob Arminius, and like Erasmus, he believed that man's will was only impaired; it wasn't in complete bondage to sin. So his views began to pick up steam and shortly after his death, his followers drafted a document that became known as the Remonstrance of 1610 because they were remonstrating or they were refuting the concept of unconditional election, and their

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beliefs became known as Arminianism which taught that election was based upon foreseen faith; that God looked down the corridor of time and he chose specific individuals based on what they would do when they were presented with the Gospel, so man was saved on the basis of his will really, not God's, and basically man then is seen as joined together and cooperating with God to obtain salvation. I've written out the position that they encapsulated in basically their five points: they believed in partial depravity, not totally depravity; that man's will is impaired but not destroyed, he can accept or reject the Gospel freely. They believed in conditional election that God elects individuals based on foreseen faith. They believed in universal atonement, that Jesus died and atoned for the sins of everyone without exception. They believed in resistible not irresistible grace and that is the call of the Holy Spirit to repentance can be resisted. And they finally believed that you could fall from grace; that it's possible for a truly redeemed person to lose their salvation.

Well, in order to refute what others believed to be those erroneous positions which, again, most of the modern evangelical church embraces today, 26 theologians from eight different countries decided to get together in 1618 through 19 in the city of Dordrecht, Netherlands in what was called the Synod of Dort. Synod is just an old word for a council, for a church council. And based upon what they would argue would be the clear teachings of the New Testament, they refuted the Remonstrance of 1610 that the Arminians had presented and their reply would be known as the Five Points of Calvinism based upon the great Geneva reformer, John Calvin, who had been dead for decades by the drafting of that particular document. Nevertheless, even though he was dead, because of his compelling biblical exegesis that he championed, this inspired the members of the synod to identify with him and encapsulate their views in what's called the Five Points of Calvinism and that is often depicted in the acronym TULIP, T-U-L-I-P, which I have done for you.

So here's what they drafted. They believed in total depravity, not partial depravity, sometimes this is also called total inability and I've summarized this a bit for you: because man's corruption is so deep and so strong as to make him spiritually dead, a slave of sin and morally unable to overcome his own rebellion and blindness, man is unable by his own will to respond to the Gospel. Also, they described unconditional election: God's election is an unconditional act of free grace that was given through his Son Jesus before the world began. God elects men to salvation based on his own sovereign will, not man's. Also the doctrine of limited rather than unlimited atonement: Christ died to redeem all whom the Father had given him. He did not die for all without exception, offering sinners only a potential salvation subject to their acceptance. His was an actual and specific atonement for the elect. Then they spoke of irresistible grace: the effectual call of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted. All the elect will come to salvation. And then finally, they

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argued for the perseverance of the saints: the elect can never lose their salvation and will endure until the end.

Now, I would humbly argue that Jesus was a Calvinist and if I can take you to John 6 for a moment, I will use this as one passage to help you understand this. You will recall that in John 6 Jesus was in the process of utterly demolishing the Jews' whole system of works righteousness with what would be considered today the Five Points of Calvinism, really they're just biblical New Testament concepts. By the way, what he did in John 6 was so offensive, what he taught was so offensive that according to verse 66, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." So this has been controversial from the beginning.

Well, you will recall the context there in John 6, the multitude, especially the Jews, wanted another sign. "Do something else miraculous and then maybe we'll believe in you." In verse 36, "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe." There is the doctrine of total depravity, total inability. They saw Jesus, they saw all of the things he did and yet they are so ruined by their sin that it was impossible for them to understand who he was and to humbly submit to his Gospel message and we see this throughout Scripture that no one seeks for God, no one desires God until God does something to grant new birth and give them the gift of faith.

Going on in verse 37, Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Here you have unconditional election and irresistible grace. We know that God the Father chose a bride for his Son according to the kind intention of his uninfluenced will, and left unto himself, man is unable, he's even unwilling to seek God unless God does something, unless God takes the initiative, and then when God calls his elect unto salvation, they no longer resist the grace of God but rather they voluntarily, they freely, they joyfully respond by the power of the Spirit's work of regeneration that creates within them a renewed will, a renewed mind, a renewed heart and so forth.

Verse 38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Here we see one example of the doctrine of limited atonement, or sometimes it's called particular or specific redemption. Think about it, what was the will of the Father who sent Jesus? Well, he sent him to actually, not potentially but actually atone for the sins of all those whom the Father had given him in eternity past; all those that had been chosen. So Jesus actually, not potentially but he actually satisfied the wrath of God toward his people by taking their judgment upon himself. He actually redeemed them. He actually reconciled specific persons to God through his death. He actually, I like to think of it this way, bore my sins personally in his body on my behalf.

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Then Jesus expands on this very theme in verses 39 and 40, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." There you have the perseverance of the saints, or better, the perseverance of God with this saints. We are eternally secure in Christ and as we see in Scripture, God perseveres with his elect. He keeps us from falling away which we would certainly do were it left unto ourselves. So perseverance really becomes the certain proof of election.

So these are just the essential truths of the Gospel and God's sovereign grace is always at work and he uses us to accomplish his will in evangelism. So, friends, if I can put it to you this way, as we look at Scripture, we see that man cannot and will not be saved apart from sovereign election, and repeatedly in Scripture, believers are referred to as God's elect, and if that is true, then there had to have been an election some time and we read about that earlier. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," Ephesians 1:4. Verse 11, "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." Romans 8:30, "these whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Let me give you another in Acts 13:48, it says, "When the Gentiles heard this," referring to the Gospel that was being offered to them, "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Now, if we can go to another passage in 1 Peter 1, the first two verses, we see how Peter also was trying to comfort the saints there that were being persecuted in incredible ways. They were scattered all over everywhere and what does he use to encourage them? He uses this profound doctrine, the doctrine of unconditional election which is so crucial for triumphant living in a hostile world. The end of verse 1, he addressed them as those "who are chosen," *eklektos* in the original language. You get the word "elect" from that; it means "to choose," it means "to select." Those who were "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Now, some will use this text to argue that foreknowledge is basically the idea of him looking down the corridors of time and seeing who would and wouldn't and then basing his election upon that and that's, again, known as conditional election and they will cite Peter's words, they'll also go to Romans 8:29 where Paul says, "for whom He foreknew, He also predestined." But I would humbly argue that that's a very tortured and very man-centered interpretation of the term "foreknowledge," and it's utterly contrary to the doctrine of unconditional election. I mean, think about it, first of all, faith is a gift of God, right? We know that, so how can God's gift of salvation be considered the basis of God's elective grace? That makes no sense to me and these two texts, I would also argue, give absolutely no hint as to what God foreknew and is pure conjecture to assume that he's referring here to some

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supernatural foresight or knowledge of those who would and would not believe. You have to put that into the text. Moreover, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, we see that God is repeatedly affirmed as the one who is sovereign over salvation, not man. And Jesus told his disciples in John 15:16, "You did not choose Me but I chose you." Romans 9:16, salvation "does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Again, we're saved by grace alone, not through anything that we have done. It is a gift of God, not as a result of works so that no man may boast, Ephesians 2:8 and 9.

So we have no basis to share in the glory of our salvation. Man is spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1 tells us that. So, yes, man does have a free will. Of course he does, but he has no desire to exercise that will and be saved. You know, I have the free will to go out here and eat hay with my horses, right? But I have no desire to do that. Likewise, fallen man has no desire nor does he have any capacity to respond to truth apart from divine regeneration. Romans 3:11, "There is no one who understands, there is none who seeks for God." So, again, I would humbly argue that any definition of foreknowledge that assumes man can initiate his own salvation and that God elects them on that basis is simply incompatible with the doctrine of man's total depravity, his total inability.

I was thinking about this this past week as I was meditating upon these truths. I remember in 1 Timothy 1, and you will remember as well, how Paul said of himself that he was "a former blasphemer." Remember that? "And a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy," he says. He goes on to say that "the grace of our Lord was more than abundant." Then he added, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy." Paul understood who he really was and that it was through no merit of his own that God would look down through the corridors of time and say, "Oh boy, Paul figured it out and he bowed the knee. I'm going to elect him and eventually save him." That would have been preposterous. He didn't rejoice and say, "Well, I rejoice in foreseeing faith that caused God to elect me."

Also, the Old Testament concept of "to know," the term "know," and even the New Testament term "foreknowledge," carries with it the idea of something far more than just knowing something. It also speaks of having a special regard for something. It has the idea of looking upon something with special concern, in fact, to know someone in the New Testament was often used of sexual intimacy and so it carries the idea of not just foreknowing in the sense that we might think of it, but in terms of fore-loving. It carries the idea of the prior establishment of an intimate relationship.

I would also say that if foreknowledge merely referred to an advanced look into the future of some future event or advance knowledge, perhaps I should say, of some future

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event, then Jesus' words in Matthew 7:22 and following would really beg for relevance. You will remember there Jesus is describing the danger of self-deception and how many times people that call themselves Christians really aren't and ultimately he is going to reject them and he says, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never,'" here it is, "'knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." Well, of course he knew who they were, he created them, but he's not referring to that, he's essentially saying, "I never set my saving love upon you in eternity past. I never predetermined that saving relationship with you," etc.

And finally, I would submit that such a definition of foreknowledge would have been of no encouragement to the suffering saints of that day. I mean, you stop and think about it, if you're telling suffering persecuted saints, "Hey, you know, just hang in there. You were good enough and you were wise enough to initiate your salvation, to hear the Gospel and to say, 'Do you know what? I believe that. I'm going to do that.' And now it's up to you to persevere to the very end. So keep on cooperating with God. Hang in there. You can do it." I mean, what encouragement is that? But rather what he's saying is, "Folks, I know you're suffering but know this, that it was God, not you, who initiated your salvation in eternity past. He set his love upon you. You contributed nothing. Nothing. It was a gift. He set his love upon you before time began and because of his sovereign reign over all things, he will continue to strengthen you and to sustain you to persevere to the very end." Now there's comfort.

So it's no wonder that Paul would comfort them with those words. Verse 13 again, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord," here's why, "because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation," that is, God's eternal elective love that was set upon you should animate your heart to joy and thanksgiving. But he doesn't stop there, notice the next phrase, "through sanctification by the Spirit." In other words, he's telling them that, "You also need to rejoice here in that transformation that occurred when you were born again." He's referring to that magnificent miracle of regeneration and, frankly, that's just the miracle of all miracles to me; that supernatural instantaneous impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead. Paul says in Galatians 6:15 when that happens, we are "a new creation." He says in Titus 3:5, that "He saved us." How? "By the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." The term "regeneration" in Greek, *paliggenesia*, is a compound word in Greek that means "born again." Born is *genesis*, and *palin* is again. That's what he's taking about here and as we look at Scripture, we know that the author of regeneration is God himself. The agent of regeneration is the Holy Spirit and the instrument of regeneration is the word of God. You will remember, it was out of this framework that Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again," right? By the way, that wasn't an invitation. That was a declaration of fact. There was nothing Nicodemus or any of us could do to cause himself to be born again.

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God has to do something. Jesus is saying, "Nicodemus, I have to do something that you cannot do," and that's the idea of regeneration.

And folks, sanctification, being set apart from sin unto God, being gradually made more holy until we reflect the likeness of Christ, that begins at the very moment of regeneration. At that moment, suddenly there is a radical change in a man's heart. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things passed away, behold new things have come," 2 Corinthians 5:17. Now it doesn't mean that suddenly we become sinless but what it does mean is that suddenly we are freed from the bondage of sin and we're set apart unto righteousness. We have the imputed righteousness of Christ. Our whole disposition begins to change. Our lives begin to reflect the image of Christ. We begin to hate things that God hates and love the things that he loves. We begin to love things that are holy and we are repulsed by things that are not. And I know this seems foreign to many people because many Christians, or many people who claim to be Christians, do not manifest any of this and do you know why? Because they're just Christian in name only. They have never been born again.

Paul speaks of sanctification in Romans 6 and so many other passages. You will remember in verse 11 and following he says, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

So back to our text. Paul is celebrating this magnificent metamorphosis that occurs at salvation, the miracle of regeneration, the miracle that occurs there when the Spirit does that mighty work and sanctification occurs, and by implication, he's asking them to celebrate it with him and he reminds them that the Spirit regenerates those who, notice, "hear and believe the truth." Notice what he says here, "God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." Now, here we see man's responsibility to believe in the truth, something we understand from Scripture he cannot do apart from the Spirit's work of regeneration which, as I said earlier, exposes us, once again, to this inscrutable mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in salvation. But it's fascinating, isn't it, when God calls his elect to salvation, he no longer resists the grace of God but he freely, he joyfully, he voluntarily responds to the Gospel which, again, is that great work of regeneration when the Spirit of God creates within that person a renewed will. And we read about man's portion of this like in Romans 10:9-10, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in

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The Essence and Effects of Unconditional Election

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

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salvation." And yet the amazing thing about it all is that we could never do that unless God did something to help that occur because we're spiritually dead.

Well, all of these wonderful soul-stirring, soul-satisfying truths are contained in Paul's words to the Thessalonians and to each of us, but notice he goes on to say as we wrap this up this morning in verse 14, "It was for this He called you." By the way, that calling is referring to that irresistible effectual call to salvation. "It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we move beyond the need to just have a humble attitude and have humble gratitude for God unconditionally choosing to save us, but secondly now, he's encouraging them to have a heart of joyful anticipation and this is so exciting to me. He says "that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Beloved, please understand what he is saying here. He is wanting them to get excited about the reality, the certain reality that as believers, they will one day obtain the glory of Christ when they are transformed into his very image. Now if that doesn't make your head explode, I don't know what will. I mean, this is just magnificent.

Now think about this, Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned and fallen short of," what? "Of the glory of God." It's interesting in the original language, the grammar tells us that we are continuously falling short of that glory, and the construction of the verb is in what we call the middle voice which indicates that the reason we are continuously falling short of the glory of God is not because of something outside of us making us do that, but rather something inside of us, referring to our unredeemed humaneness, our sinfulness. And so it's because of our sin nature that we're continuously falling short of the glory of God, but what Paul is saying here and in so many other passages is that a day is coming when, by God's transforming saving grace, all of that is going to be reversed. He's wanting them to celebrate this.

Romans 5:2 came to my mind where Paul says, "we exult in hope of the glory of God." Kids, let me add a new word to your vocabulary that you can use similarly close to awesome, alright? We hear the word "awesome" all the time, how about the word "exult"? Wouldn't it be great to exult in the glory of God. That's what Paul is saying here which, by the way, means "to feel and to show," just triumphant elation over what is promised to us. "We exult in the hope of the glory of God."

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:2, "now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I have also been fully known." In other words, not only will we see the glory of God when we see him face to face but we will have the same kind of intimate understanding of his person, of his character, likened to the knowledge that he has of us. It speaks of this unrestricted fellowship that we will have in the glorious presence of our God, and we will experience this personal transformation

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into the glory of Christ. Remember what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

You remember how John says, "Beloved, now we are the children of God and it has not yet appeared as yet what we shall be." Then he goes on to say this, "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is." Philippians 3:20, "He will transform the body of our humble state." All we have to do is look in the mirror and realize how humble this state is, right? He is going to transform the body of our humble state "into conformity with the body of His glory." How is he going to do that? By the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.

Now, folks, as we wrap this up this morning, may I ask you: do you think that the Father is going to present to his Son an ugly bride? Would any Father want to do that? Of course not. Ephesians 5:27, God will "present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." Oh, child of God, don't miss this. This is Paul's point: "I know you're struggling. I know you're reeling under the weight of persecution, but know this, God set his love upon you in eternity past and he chose you through no merit of your own, and then eventually he called you unto himself. He made you into a new creation. And the reason he did this is so that you could reflect his glory forever and enjoy him forever." I ask you, do you think that any of us could really opt out of that plan? It sounds kind of silly when you think of it that way, don't you think? I think so. Do you think any of us could thwart his eternal purposes? "No, I tried this Christian, I just don't buy it anymore." No.

So Paul encourages them that one day they, we are going to, I love this, gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, it doesn't say this, but here's what I think it says in parenthesis: he leaned forward and said, "Now what was it you were complaining about? Do you see the point? What are you complaining about? God has done all this and you're complaining about what? Yeah, I know it's tough but don't lose sight of his redeeming plan in your life. Let this animate your heart to praise." And somehow I could just hear the apostle's voice in the background in Romans 8:35 and following, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Oh, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we all need to celebrate these great truths. Let them sink deep into your heart. And if you're here today and you say, "You know, I really

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don't know for sure if I know Christ but I want to. I wonder if I'm part of the elect." Don't worry about that. If you have a longing for his mercy, guess what? You are longing for that mercy because the Spirit of God is doing a work in you right now and it's an amazing thing how many times I've seen it, that then we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we're saved. It's just an amazing thing.

Well, I want to leave you with this thought, especially those of you that may struggle with the doctrine of unconditional election and I want to be sympathetic. I used to struggle with it. I was fully Arminian. I was born an Arminian, okay? And that's okay. It's not, you know, a measure of orthodoxy here and I want to be kind to those of you that would differ with the position that I've just barely laid out. But I would challenge you with this thought: if in the grand scope of your theology you deny the sovereignty of God over salvation, you really must not still claim to glorify and worship him as God, for if God is not sovereign, he is not God. It's as simple as that, and there can be no greater evidence of his glory than in his sovereign reign over every aspect of creation, nor can there be a more profound act of humble worship than to praise him for setting his love upon you simply because he chose to do so. And folks, it's because of that type of mercy that we give him praise and we live for his glory, amen? Amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. Again, as I've said repeatedly, we don't fully understand all of these things but what we do understand is that were it not for you, we would have never come to you, and we celebrate your love here today. And I pray for those who may not know you but maybe they think they do, or maybe they just outright reject the Gospel. Lord, we know that that's such an indication of a person who is just dead in their sin and, Lord, only you can cause them to be born again. So we plead with you to that end. We plead for the salvation of our children. O God, save them. Our friends, our family members, save them, we pray. So we commit it all to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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