

The Church Chosen and Called

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Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
Preached on: Sunday, January 23, 2022

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We read the word of God in 2 Thessalonians 2.

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. 8 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: 9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 13 But we are bound to give thanks alway 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: 14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. 16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, 17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

I call your attention to verses 13 and 14 of this chapter.

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway 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: 14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The text, beloved, is not a pat on the back. "Things aren't going well in the world around you but at least you are saved." That's not the way to approach our text. Some might look at it that way, some might turn to our text and say, "Here's proof, here's proof in scripture that people who are told that they are elect and therefore are going to heaven on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ, therefore think they're better than others." But somebody who tries to use this text to make that point hasn't read or certainly does not understand the text. At every turn this text is about grace: the grace of God having chosen us in eternity, the grace of God having worked in us the new life of Christ and so giving us faith and sanctification, the grace of God according to which we will obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of God that he shows to sinners who are unworthy. Put the text in light of its context and you do not congratulate yourself this evening for knowing that you are the church of God, you are profoundly humbled, amazed, and thankful.

In the last several months, I've brought you the word of God from verses 3 through 9 of the chapter, and again 10 through 12 of the chapter, and we've seen that chapter 2 is the heart of this epistle and it speaks of two signs that will accompany the coming of Jesus Christ, the sign of antichrist, and the sign of apostasy, both signs that appear in the church. Some signs appear in the history of the world around, wars and rumors of wars, they're happening around us, but they're not as close to us, but these are close.

There will be some, there already are some and increasingly there will be some who once said, "I believe in the Triune God and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, my Savior," and who will later say, "I don't pretend to believe that anymore." There are some already now and will be even more some who say, "I will live a holy and a godly life," and who at some point will say, "I'm not even going to pretend to do that anymore." That's apostasy in the church of Christ. Then within the church, at least broadly speaking the church, will come one who says, "I am the Christ you have been waiting for. Look to me. Worship me. Serve me. Your life will be better if you do as I say." And so many will be deceived.

Two events that accompany the coming of Christ that occur in the church of Christ and that from an outward viewpoint leave the church very distressed, troubled, and smaller, and the question arises in the mind of the child of God as he or she hears this word of God, in the context, "What really will happen to the church then? Will there be a church left? How many will turn from faith to unbelief and from godliness to ungodliness? Will I, too? Will there be any left who hold to the traditions of the fathers which the apostle in verse 15 exhorts us to stand fast in and hold fast? Will there be?" And the answer of the text is: yes, there will for you, you, church of Jesus Christ in distinction from the world, and you true church of Jesus Christ in distinction from the false or apostatizing churches,

you have been chosen from eternity, saved in time, and are being prepared for everlasting glory.

The text, then, is a great contrast to what has proceeded and is a contrast that encourages and comforts you and me. There is a contrast in three ways in our text versus what's been before the text. In the first place, the contrast has to do with the everlasting end or destiny, those who apostatized are going to perish but you will obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who will perish were appointed to that and they were reprobated from all eternity, but you have been chosen in Jesus Christ. And the way by which God will bring to hell those whom he has appointed to hell is not just the way of telling them, "Well, you're going to go to hell," but the way of their unbelief and ungodliness, their departure from truth and from the law of God, their receiving not the love of the truth that they might be saved, whereas the way, not the way something you have to do but the way God works in us to bring his elect to heaven is the way of sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth whereunto he called you by our gospel. The eternal appointment, the everlasting end, and the means by which God accomplishes all that in time are all contrasted in our text for the church versus those who have fallen aside.

What's illustrated is the antithesis but what explains the antithesis is God's grace. Let's see that grace more fully. The text displays it in an amazing way at every turn. Let's see that as we consider it under the theme "The Church Chosen and Called." First of all, chosen in eternity; second, saved in time; and third, thankful always. This text is stuffed full with important concepts, relevant teaching, too, I might add, to the days in which the PRC are living, and so it's going to be the sort of sermon that taxes you because we're going to go deep, but to make it easier, let's be clear that in the first part of the sermon and the first point, I'm going to focus on just two parts of the text, almost two words, the word "chosen" and the word "salvation," and we'll begin with that second word, "chosen you unto salvation."

You might say, "I know what salvation is. I've heard about it all my life. It's that my sins are forgiven." But one thing we have to emphasize tonight, beloved, is how broad the concept "salvation" is and why you may not merely say salvation means my sins are forgiven, as if salvation means nothing more than that your sins are forgiven. Of course, salvation includes the forgiveness of sins, justification, but don't ever say salvation is justification or justification is salvation if by that you mean to give the impression that justification is all that salvation consists of.

Salvation is broad. Salvation in scripture refers to deliverance of one who is miserable and giving them great happiness applied especially now to sinners. Then salvation refers to everything God does with a view to delivering us from the bondage and misery and corruption of sin and giving us to enjoy covenant fellowship with him now and forever. And that means that salvation includes the plan for salvation in eternity. Salvation includes the foundation of salvation and the basis of it in time in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. And even more, salvation includes every work of the Spirit in you and me by which the sinner is made a saint.

We speak of an order to salvation or a chain of salvation and put seven components to that: regeneration, calling faith, and there is justification, yes, there is the forgiveness of sins but then sanctification, preservation, and glorification. All are salvation. That unto which we have been chosen, then, is not just the forgiveness of sins now, and it is not just that one day we'll go to heaven, whatever heaven is, but that unto which we have been chosen is a complete reversal of the power and bondage of sin in us.

Now as you look at the text, you see that the word must be used in a broad way. It speaks of election, salvation determined in time. It speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ who obtained it by his death on the cross. But four of those seven aspects of the order of salvation are reflected in our text and justification is not one of them, not in the text explicitly anyway. Notice the four that are: sanctification, belief of the truth or faith, calling, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel," and glorification, that is, "the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The concept "salvation" is broad. Even though we haven't spoken yet about election, choosing, let's see that the Canons of Dort underscore that when we've been chosen to salvation, it's more than that we've been chosen to go to heaven but that the work of God determining from all eternity to bring us to heaven includes giving us every grace of which salvation consists.

So I'm going to read in a moment out of Article 7, Head 1 of the Canons of Dort. There's two paragraphs in that Article. I'm going to go right to the second. We're not going to define election at the moment but this, "This elect number God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him," and then notice how the Canons elaborate on all that the decree of election encompasses, "to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of his glorious grace." In other words, even election is not just a matter of God saying, "I will forgive some people's sins or I will bring some to heaven but I will give them in time every single gift that comprises salvation, that manifests the grace of God, and that serves to bring sinners into fellowship with Jehovah God."

Broad but at the same time, there is one of those four aspects of salvation mentioned in the text that the apostle especially has in mind by this word "salvation." Let's look at the text again a moment, "hath 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." And that becomes our focus now especially that I will obtain the glory of Jesus Christ. That's more than just saying my sins are forgiven, that's saying that God is going to so radically renew and change me that whereas apart from his grace I could only sin, would live in sin, would love sin, would run after sin, now I will experience and enjoy the pleasures of the glory of Christ my Lord.

What are those pleasures? What is that glory of Jesus Christ? It certainly can't be that the apostle is telling us that we will sit at God's right hand. We will be in heaven, that will be part of the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, but in heaven we will not be chief, Jesus Christ will be King of kings, Lord of lords, at the right hand of God to all

eternity. But you'll go to heaven. That's part of his glory. Another part of his glory, then, is that Jesus Christ experiences perfect and intimate fellowship with Jehovah God and so will you and me to a degree we cannot here on earth. Then part of that glory is that we will reflect, radiate the glory of Jehovah God himself, which is to say, we will live sinlessly and show that we're children of God in our conduct.

But when the apostle speaks of our obtaining this glory, he is not referring only to the day of our death as though the obtaining is entirely a matter of the future. You have already now begun to obtain the glory of Jesus Christ when you were regenerated by the Spirit of Christ, and Christ became alive in you and me again when the image of God was restored to us and we began to have true righteousness, holiness and the true knowledge of God. We already now begin to obtain that glory. There will be progress in our obtaining of that glory all through this life as we grow in grace, there will be progress in the obtaining of that glory when we die and our soul goes to heaven, and ultimately and finally we will obtain that glory in its fullness when we go to heaven, the whole church, in the day of the return of Jesus Christ.

Now of all of this salvation, every aspect of it, this thought is prominent in the text: it is a gift of the grace of God. Instead of asking how are you and I different from those who will fall away and not be saved, let's ask a moment how are we similar to, what have we in common? And the answer, in the first place, will be that in common we're humans that share in the common misery of sin; and the answer will be in the second place, that even if our environment or upbringing different in any respect, if maybe we were born in the church and one of them came in later, if maybe our parents were godly parents and took parenting seriously than there's did, if there are those differences it didn't in the final analysis make the difference in our life. What makes the difference in our life is the grace of God and that's underscored in the text in relation to the context for the text underscores that this grace of God bringing us to heaven is a particular grace. Not everybody obtains it. That's the context. Some go to hell.

In the second place, those who do go to heaven have obtained the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and that means the gift has been given to them that they did not have, inherently it means even more, it means that somebody gave us this gift, and not that I could go find it on a store shelf and buy it or do something of my own to get it. It is given.

And thirdly, what above all else underscores that the salvation of which the text speaks is a gift of God's grace is this: that glory which is given us is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. One word, one name of our Savior would have been enough and then even then the grace of God in saving us would have been underscored, but three names to bring out the fullness both of his person and of his work in saving us, and to underscore that every aspect of his work was needed for your and my salvation is Jesus, Jehovah's salvation, God. And there is no salvation, is there, if God does not design it and accomplish it? But he did. He sent his Son into our flesh. He became man that he might reconcile sinful humans to the holy God.

He is Christ. That is to say he is the anointed one, the Messiah of the Old Testament promised now come in the New, and therefore he is our only prophet, our eternal high priest, and our only king. And that's not just to say a few more words about what it means that he's anointed but it's to point to everything he does as prophet, priest and king as being absolutely foundationally necessary for our salvation apart from which we would not be saved. He declares to you and to me today the truth. We'll speak in the second point about that belief of the truth, but Jesus Christ is the one who declares that truth which we believe.

He is the one who not only is our high priest who laid down his life on the cross and there obtained salvation for us, laid the foundation because God would save sinners and God's justice must be satisfied with respect to those sins, but he is also now the one who intercedes for us at God's right hand and pours out by his Spirit on us all the blessings of salvation apart from which we are not saved. And he is our king who defends us yet from sin for there is sin in me, and there's sin you, and there's sin amongst us, and our Lord and Savior defends and preserves us, defends and preserves his life in us that we're not overcome again with sin.

And that's not enough, that's just Jesus and Christ, but he is also Lord which is very simply to say that having done for us all that he did as Jesus Christ, he owns you and me, not just as a body, the church generally, but every one of us individually he has purchased with his blood and in such a way now that Satan cannot lay claim to us anymore and say, "God, I've got that one. You mayn't have him or her." But God says and Jesus says, "No, he's mine, she's mine. I died to redeem him or her. I am the Lord, his Lord, her Lord. He or she will serve me." And now listen to that, beloved congregation, our Lord Jesus Christ, and stand amazed that you've been saved.

Unto that salvation, says the text, we've been chosen so that's the second concept that we're going to deal with in this first point. You understand, I think, that the idea of being chosen here is being elected from all eternity, chosen out of the whole mass of humanity unto the praise and the glory of God. Our text speaks of different characteristics of that decree of election, especially it speaks of election being eternal, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation," where the point is not that when God created the heavens and the earth, the next thing he did was say, "I should decide to save some." And the idea is not that on the sixth day after he created man or after the week of creation when Adam and Eve fell, God said, "I should decide whom I'm going to save." But where the idea is that even before God began his creative work, he had determined whom he would save and whom he would not. Eternal.

That decree of election is particular, God chose some in distinction from others. The decree is sovereign and the carrying out is sovereign. It is all of God. But although we could point out other characteristics of election that come out of the text, this especially the text teaches that election is explained by the preference or the heart or the will of God for which he gives no deeper explanation than simply this, "It's what I wanted to do."

Now that comes especially in the Greek word that's used here. There are two words commonly used in the New Testament to refer to election. There is the word often translated "elect" or "election; called out." There's another word "predestinated" which we often use in our theology to refer to both election and reprobation but which the scriptures often use more narrowly in connection with election specifically, "for those whom he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, them he called," etc. Those are two Greek words most often used to refer to election.

What we have in our text is a word that's used only three times in the New Testament and only once with reference to God. It's a unique word, in other words, and it's a word that means "preferred." It's what Paul said he did, Philippians 1:22. At least were you to have to put to him the question which did he prefer, did he prefer to die and go to be with Christ or would he prefer to be on earth and live with and serve the church. He wasn't sure which he would prefer but that's the word he uses. It's the word used with reference to Moses in Hebrews 11:25, he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." This was his preference. It wasn't just a matter of his mind weighing all the options, he needs to make a calculated decision and so he's very cerebral about it; he weighs the pros and cons and finally comes to a decision. He says, "No, this is what's in my heart." And that's the word that's used in our text to refer to being chosen. It was in the heart of God.

Now it's good the Spirit uses this word at least once lest you and I form the idea that election is only an intellectual exercise on the part of Jehovah God. It's just a matter of God saying, "Well, let's see, I have this plan and it would work best if these went here and it would work best if those went there." Election is not just that, election is the work of God appointing unto eternal life those whom he loves and so he prefers.

Now you say, "I'd like to know more. I understand what you're saying, professor. I understand that I've been chosen and I'm amazed at that, but why me? Why not another? Why?" And this is all the answer you're going to get from this text and all the answer you'll get from anywhere in the scripture: it's what God preferred. We can add one more thing to it and that is that the glory of his own name is what governed his preference and his love for some in distinction from his hatred of others. That's as much as you and I can say.

That love of God for some comes out in the text, though, for the text is addressed to the brethren beloved of the Lord. The apostle is not merely saying there that after Jesus Christ died for us, then God said, "Well, now I know who to love. I love those for whom Christ died." But in fact, God showed his love by sending Christ. This love is an eternal love. This love goes all the way back into the counsel of God. Why did he choose some? He loved us.

Maybe one of you young men has looked around at all of the young ladies at high school and decided to select one of them to entertain regularly, and maybe that young lady says to you someday, "There are 200 hundred girls that go to Covenant, why did you pick me?" And then if you're a godly young man, and by that I mean if what's governing your

choice of a young lady is not lust but true godly Christ-like love, that's the answer you give to her, "I love you." Now if that's the answer you give to her, you'd better show it in word and in deed that you do truly love her, and your love for her is ultimately this, young man, that you seek her obtaining the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The point I'm making especially is that when she says to you, "I want to know more. I want to know why me, why not her?" You could maybe say, "Well, I had a preference. That's what it comes down to. I preferred it. But don't you think for a minute," that young man may say to that young woman, "that that preference is just self-seeking. I will love you." That's what the apostle is saying to the church on behalf of Jesus Christ, "Brethren beloved of the Lord, God hath chosen you to salvation." And so Christ came and died, atoned to take sin away, to justify, but also arose to continue that saving work in time.

Now in the second point there's three parts of the text that we have to look at. The first is, well, two, I guess, the first one includes two ideas. The first is the end of verse 13, "chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," and after we've finished with that, we're going to look at the first part of verse 14, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel." All three of these ideas, sanctification, faith and calling, are part of that work of salvation in time. Something else is going on here and you and I may not overlook it, Jehovah God is saying by what means he carries out his will of election, for he uses means.

Set forth, then, in this part of the sermon is not going to be what you and I have to go do to become saved, set forth at this part of the sermon is going to be the grace of God according to which and by which means he saved us, and set forth in this part of the sermon is going to be this reality, too, that if he sanctified you, you live a holy life. That's your calling, that if he worked faith in you, you believe, that's your calling, not to add to or to help God but because he has by his irresistible grace saved.

There's an exegetical question that comes up in that phrase "sanctification of the Spirit," and the exegetical question is this: does the Holy Spirit in our text mean to refer to the sanctification that the Holy Spirit works in us? And you probably say immediately, "Yes, that's what he means to say." I say, "How do you know that?" You say, "Because the word 'Spirit' is capitalized." But that was the King James translators' interpretation. Or does the Holy Spirit mean to say here that sanctification grabs ahold of your spirit, depraved, corrupt by nature, your spirit which includes your will and every aspect of your being and he says, "I'm going to sanctify it"? And that's not to exclude the sanctification of the body, sanctification works from the inside out, as it were. What does the Spirit mean? Now to be clear, both are true theologically, it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies and the Holy Spirit sanctifies our spirit; in the second place, to be clear, both could be true grammatically and that's why it's a question. In the Greek, the one reading the text in the Greek doesn't come away saying, "It must be this and it cannot be that." But I'm going to point for you a reason why it could very well be that the text is saying your spirit is sanctified, and that reason is that in the Greek, although it's not clearly that it means this and not the other, there is no word "holy" and there is no word "the." Sanctification of spirit, that's all we're told. Sanctification of spirit.

Now regardless, then, of what it means, we're not going to solve that, here's what the Holy Spirit is clearly teaching us, that the Spirit works in you and me a great and mighty change. We were unbelievers and now we have in us belief of the truth. We were unholy, corrupt, we pursued, we loved sin, and now we are sanctified, we hate sin, we love the law of God, we pursue that law, we run the way of God's law. What a great change has been worked in us. That's why I said earlier you partake of the glory of Jesus Christ already now, not in final form but in beginning form, inasmuch as you and I have been regenerated by the Spirit of God.

Both sanctification and faith of which the text speaks, are to be clear the work of the grace of God in us. They are the irresistible grace of God and that's not in question, although notice that the text doesn't speak of it only from the viewpoint of what God works in you but also from the viewpoint of how you and I manifest them. Sanctification of spirit, that's maybe not so clearly my manifesting it, but belief of the truth. Belief. We would say the Holy Spirit works faith in us but when the apostle speaks of belief he means you believe. So what is being done here in the text is that the apostle is saying by this means God works in his people the salvation unto which he has appointed us from eternity and this means changes us in such a way that the world can see, and the apostate can see, and the false church can see that we are graced and saved.

This explains why a man or a woman cannot be an ungodly unbeliever to his or her dying day and think that he or she will still go to heaven. If all there is to salvation is justification, that could happen. Then perhaps I could live in my sins and in my unbelief my whole life on earth and yet I've been forgiven, God's grace in Christ has taken my sin away. I just don't know it or I just don't manifest it but in the day of my death, though I was an ungodly unbeliever to that dying day, I go to heaven. It doesn't happen that way for we are saved through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. He who is saved will certainly inevitably be given these graces.

Young people, are you understanding what I'm saying? You cannot say at Covenant or in my high school years or in my college years, "I may live how I want. My mom and dad won't like it, maybe my grandparents won't like it, the elders might not like it, but I can live how I want and say I'm a child of God." You cannot, you may not but you cannot say that for those whom God has saved he gives true faith and holiness.

And when the child of God believes and when the child of God lives a holy life, the child of God does not say, "My faith and my holiness have contributed to my salvation. I have worked with God." But the child of God says, "This is what God has done in me. Praise be to God." Why is it not possible, why is it not possible what I've explained to be not possible, that I cannot live in unbelief or ungodliness until my dying day and still go to heaven? Why? And the answer is because God views salvation from the beginning of it in eternity to the end of it in eternity future and every step in between, as one organic whole. It's a chain, as our Canons of Dort also says, and it's a chain that can't be broken. It's a chain which doesn't have missing links. It's a chain which isn't going to get you to heaven if there's a link missing. Besides, now to use Romans 8 again, whom God did predestinate, them he also called and whom he called he also justified, and whom he

justified them he also glorified. Inevitably, irresistibly certainly God gives every aspect of salvation to those whom he's appointed to salvation, chosen in Christ.

It's not because of you or me, what we did or what we didn't do, it's because God says, "This is what salvation is," and it's for that reason that I must be a godly believer not in order to help God save me but to manifest that indeed he has saved me. It's for that reason that Jesus Christ not only died but also rose again. If salvation, at least the work of Christ in salvation were only a matter of his dying for us, then you can argue that salvation is only justification, and you can argue that there's no calling to me, no imperative to live a new and godly life, but I'll end up in heaven regardless of how I live here below. But he didn't just die. He rose. He's alive and he lives in you. That's part of your being brethren beloved of the Lord and therefore you have been changed, you do believe, you will live a new and godly life. It's your calling and God will see to it, by which I don't mean so let down your laurels but God will be sure you do it. No, it's your calling and by turning to God for grace to carry out that calling, you will find he gives you that grace and that power.

Then there's one more aspect of salvation here, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining." Whereunto he called you by our gospel. So here we're being told in what way salvation and faith and sanctification are worked in us and the use of the means of grace. We've got a second layer of means here. The means of God carrying out his decree of election is the means of giving us sanctification and faith, and then the means of us understanding we have that sanctification and faith, the means of being preserved, the means of growing in it, is calling. And when we speak of calling, we are referring to both the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of his people through that preaching.

That the preaching of the gospel is on the apostle's mind here is clear when he says, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel." When it comes to the content of the gospel, what man could say, "That's my gospel"? No man can. God determined the content of the gospel. When it comes to the work of salvation that's carried out through the gospel, what minister can say, "That's my gospel"? No minister may. It's God's gospel so when Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit says, "I'm talking about my gospel," he means the gospel that he preached in distinction from another man who maybe pretended he had a gospel, said some nice things, but it didn't regard the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in this gospel God calls us and that's to say that God speaks to us. You hear the voice of Jesus Christ tonight. I knew some in our own denomination once who said that means the preacher thinks he's Christ. Not so. You hear the tenor or the tone of the voice of Professor Kuiper but in the gospel that Professor Kuiper brings, you hear Jesus Christ spiritually with ears of faith, and what you hear Jesus Christ doing and saying, "Come unto me." What you hear Jesus Christ doing and saying, "There is fellowship. This is how you will experience and grow in faith and sanctification. This is the way in which you will know you are chosen to salvation and saved in time, you will have fellowship with your Lord and Savior."

So God calls us and there's other reasons why it's good that he calls us. It's good because of my old man. You see, my old man and your old man, just like mine, we turn to doubt. We're called to faith, we're given faith, but we turn to doubt and we say, "I don't know that I'm saved." And then Jesus Christ calls us in the gospel and he says, "I love you. You are saved. I love you." But whenever that old man is called to sanctification but that old man does, indeed, delight in the sins of the world, he turns aside to it sometimes in thought if not also in word and deed and God comes to us in the gospel and he says, "Come back. Come back. Don't walk that way. Come back through the gospel." As Jesus Christ calls us by his Spirit, we are built up in faith and holiness and empowered to live as those who are saved.

By this also, the apostles is explaining the fact that in the context he referred to those who would be destroyed but they heard the gospel. They received not the love of the truth but they knew the truth, intellectually they knew the truth, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But they knew what truth was and they knew what righteousness and unrighteousness was. How do you explain apostasy, that's the question, how do you explain that on earth a group of people hear the gospel proclaimed and some believe it unto salvation and others for a while pretend to and they turn aside? How? It has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in their heart or the absence of that work.

You have been called. The Holy Spirit works in your heart. It isn't just a matter of knowing Catechism, salvation is not just a matter of being baptized, salvation is not just a matter of saying, "I have some morals. I'm going to live an outwardly godly life." Salvation is a matter of the Holy Spirit working true faith and holiness in you, and when you understand this, two things, we sit under the preaching, that first, we don't despise the teaching, we don't say, "I don't need the preaching," we attend to the preaching and, secondly, we're thankful.

That brings me to the third point, thankful always. "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you." First of all, it's the apostle speaking here and the apostle speaks as a pastor, very professor, or anyone who stands before you and brings you this word. So it's my thanksgiving to you that's being expressed here too. "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord." Why? Because this gospel that we bring you hear not only with outward ears but you believe and it changes your life and you live a sanctified life.

Now the apostle knew he couldn't do that to his hearers. He had been to Thessalonica, even there and then you could take everywhere he went as an illustration, but in Thessalonica as the Thessalonians knew, some believed and some didn't. It wasn't Paul who could make some believe. God did and that's why he's thankful. That's the thanksgiving, then, of every Protestant Reformed pastor, of every ordained minister in the PRC, for the PRC believers, holy, godly, sanctified believers who hear the gospel and grow in grace. And the thanksgiving of the pastor is not, first of all, to you because neither did you do that in your own power, neither did you believe and live a holy life, but we are thankful to God for you.

First of all, if that's the thanks of the pastor, it must, then, secondly, become the thanks each one of you in the congregation have for each other. You look around at others in your congregation some of whom you love and you say why do you love them? "Because they're my friends." And others you say, "I'm not so sure I like him or her." Why not. "Because they're not my friends." Or maybe there's something about this or that, a personality thing between you and another. It's easy for us to say, "I'm thankful for him and her but not for him or her." And the text leads us to look at the church as the body of Christ and say, "I'm thankful for each and every member." Why fundamentally, why? Not because of the direct place they have in my life but fundamentally because God has turned them from sin and from unbelief, given them faith and sanctification. Is that your thanks to God for each other? It ought to be. That is, you come together to sit under the preaching of the gospel and are called by the Spirit, you can grow in that thanksgiving one for another. Do that. Do that. Give thanks consciously for each and every fellow saint and fellow believer with whom you walk the pathway to heaven.

As you give thanks for one another, you recognize that that thanksgiving is itself an evidence of faith and sanctification, and that the very fact that we're thankful for one another and live a life of faith and sanctification proves false the idea that those who think they are elect, or let me state it this way, proves false the idea that the doctrines of sovereign grace lead people to ingratitude, to pride, to unholiness, and to unbelief, what a crazy notion but it's a notion that the Arminians threw against us, and anyone who hates sovereign grace throws against us, and your answer to that is it's simply wrong. I can't prove to them that it's wrong. I know it's wrong. I know it in my own heart and life.

Then beloved, see that this thanksgiving is really the fruit of holiness and faith, and it's not the kind of fruit that just pops out on a tree the way an apple does, the tree doesn't really think about it, the tree doesn't say, "Now it's my calling to put forth apples and I'd better get busy putting forth apples." The tree is not a rational moral creature. When it comes to the fruit of the Christian life, don't think along those lines, don't think that all of this holiness and faith is something that as I just go about my life suddenly will start happening here or there, but understand that though this thanksgiving is fruit, it is also the fulfilling of the calling that God gives you and me. And the apostle underscores that in the text for he doesn't just say we thank God for you, but we are bound, that means we all went to God.

Do you get it? You were a sinner, loved sin, an unbeliever, loved unbelief, and God not only chose you and sent Christ for you but changed you. You get it, you owe God. Not the kind of debt that we'll ever repay, in fact, our paying isn't even an attempt to repay, not to recompense, not to make things equal, but he who saved us in Christ, he who did from all eternity showed us his grace and in time showed us his grace, deserves our praise to all eternity. So as you give thanks to God for each other, as you rejoice in the hearing of the preaching of the gospel, as you show you've been sanctified and to you faith has been given, you have the fruit, the concrete tangible evidence of the grace of God in you. No unbeliever gives thanks to God for the gospel or its ministry or fellow Christians, but

you do and, therefore, church of Jesus Christ striving to be faithful in a time of apostasy, true church even when you're called a whore, believe your Lord's love. Amen.

Father which art in heaven, build us up in faith and godliness, forgive graciously our sins, and hear us now for Jesus' sake. Amen.