

New Creation

Weekly Devotion #1

Below is a short devotion based on the Week 1 Devotion questions in your Renew: Session 4 handout. You'll get the most out of this devotion if you answer the questions yourself first. The goal is not for you to have the exact same response, but to understand the correct meaning of the Biblical text and then apply it personally in a way that uniquely helps you grow in your knowledge, love, and worship of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (14) To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15) So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Followers of Jesus often talk about their salvation as mainly something that Jesus did for them in the past. So, we'll say things like, "I got saved when I was 17" or "Jesus saved me from my sins." And there's nothing wrong with that! We can clearly see this "past tense" angle of salvation in this passage from 2 Thessalonians: God *chose* us to be saved and God *called* us through the gospel. But that's just the beginning! That's why we're also told that we're saved *through the sanctification of the Spirit* (that's a present, ongoing activity) and we are called in order to *obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* (that's a future hope and promise). In other words, God the Father called us to himself in the past through the power of His Spirit opening our hearts to hear, receive, and believe the gospel of His Son. And then that same Spirit sanctifies us by continually transforming us in the present to make us more like Jesus. And finally, when Christ returns in the future, the Spirit will make us perfectly glorious both in our spirits and in our bodies (Romans 8:11).

How should we respond to this all-in-one package of salvation? As the old Doxology hymn says, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!" Our salvation, from beginning to end, is the work of our Triune God and that truth should give us endless comfort and confidence. But that doesn't mean we have no part to play. Verse 13 says that even though God is the one who chose us and his Spirit is the one who sanctifies us, we still have to believe in the truth. And verse 15 makes it clear that if we are to make it to the end and obtain the glory of Jesus then we have to stand firm and hold to the traditions of the apostles - the truths of the Scriptures. So yes, there is work for us to do in this project of salvation, but don't misunderstand. We don't work *in order to* make God work in us. We work BECAUSE God works in us. Here's how the Apostle Paul says it in another letter:

"...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13)

So, let us not be lazy in our journey with Jesus! If we want to know God deeper and be more like him, let us take seriously the work and effort that we need to put into our relationship with him! But, on the other hand, don't be discouraged or dismayed thinking that your security and growth in this relationship ultimately depends on your own efforts. God is the one who will empower your efforts - not only to *do* what pleases him, but to *will* or *want* to do what pleases him. This is the beautiful paradox of the Gospel: we rest in God's unearned love and power AND we work hard because of that love and power!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, together with your Son and Spirit, *you* are the Savior. We came to you in faith, but it's because you called us. Our sins are forgiven, but it's because Jesus died for us. Our lives are changed and still changing, but that's because your Spirit is working inside of us. To you be all the glory! Forgive us for ever thinking that we've done anything deserving of this salvation. But also forgive us for the times we've been lazy - the times we've neglected to pursue you, the God who gave up so much to pursue us. Thank you for not giving up on us and for promising to finish the work that you started. Work in us both to will and work for your good pleasure and help us to rest secure in your love. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.