

SAINTS ARE SAVED BY GOD WORKS 2 THESS 2: 13-17
25th SUN AFTER PENT/ALL SAINTS NOV 6, 2016

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits 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.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Think about the last time you were at a family reunion.

You saw some people who may live a long ways away
and maybe even some you have never met before
but you are part of the same group as them
and this may even be obvious as you look at their faces.

One thing that happens at such a reunion is we learn things
about our aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.
and because of how we are related to them,
we are learning about who we ourselves are.

There are other larger groups we are also part of
even though we may be separated from the others
in one way or another.

We are citizens of a country that has a heritage.

Some of our holidays are sort of like family reunions.

We revisit our national forefathers, remember heroes,
and in the process learn about who we are.

The Christian church is a family and a community - of saints.

All Saints' day is like an annual reunion.

Some of our family is separated from us,
living in heaven, on the other side of death,

But today we revisit them in spirit
because understanding who they are & what they did
helps us to understand who we are and what we do.

As together we worship the same God
and as we follow the same path to join them in heaven.

Today we learn about ourselves from what Paul says
about the saints in Thessalonica

THANK GOD FOR GIVING GRACE AND GLORY TO SAINTS
HOLD FIRMLY TO WHAT IS TAUGHT BY THE SAINTS
GOD'S GRACE ENCOURAGES THE WORK OF HIS SAINTS

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¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

How did you become part of your family,
and how did most of us become part of this country?

We were born into it.

We have others to thank for their choices and actions
long ago which determine where & how we live today.

It is not where or to whom we were born physically
that makes us part of God's family, the church,
but it is spiritual rebirth which is also not our own doing.

It is true of saints like the Thessalonians and also of us
that God himself deserves the thanks & praise when
we are brothers in this family, loved by the Lord,
because God is the one who chose us by his free grace
long before we were born or did anything.

Part of his choosing us to be part of his family of saints
was his choosing how he was going to make it happen.

He chose before he even created the world
to save us and give us new spiritual, eternal lives
by what Jesus did for us by his death and resurrection.

He worked out this plan through the O.T. saints
and then he preserved this gospel truth & passed it down
through the saints who were our spiritual forefathers,
the firstfruits of those who were being saved.

And now the Holy Spirit has caused us to hear God's word
and to be baptized and so to be brought belief in the truth
so we also are born into this family
of brothers loved by the Lord.

And, as God planned, the Holy Spirit continues to work
causing sanctification, a word with the same root as "saints,"
which means being made holy,
as we continue to have our sins taken away
through daily repentance and forgiveness
and as we keep giving up old ways to live new holy lives.

And God continues to work out his plan for us whom he chose
by holding on to us and preserving our faith & spiritual life
through every trouble until we are gathered with
the saints around his throne in heavenly glory.
An essential part of all God has chosen by grace to do for us
is how he has chosen to do his work in us.

HOLD FIRMLY TO WHAT IS TAUGHT BY THE SAINTS

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.

Families and national cultures have traditions,
stories and special activities & practices passed down
from generation to generation.
Traditions can be lost through disruption or neglect
Sometimes people feel old traditions are worthless
until others realize that losing them means
losing part of what makes them who they are.
What Paul is talking about here is not just stories or ceremonies
that have been made up over time
but the teaching of the gospel itself.
Calling it a tradition means it is not just his own ideas
but something that was handed to him by another.
The one it comes from is God himself.
This gospel, he says is what makes saints who they are.
God saves by the Holy Spirit's causing belief in the truth
which he does by calling us through the gospel.
The word of the gospel is the Spirit's tool that causes faith
and this is how we are saved & obtain Christ's glory.
This gospel is passed on through the words of the saints,
the words written in letters like this one from St. Paul
and the spoken words of saints like the
parents and pastors and teachers of today.
This word of the gospel, Paul says, makes saints who they are.
So don't let it be neglected or forgotten
as if it was just some old tradition without value
or meaning in today's everyday world.
Hold on to it. Keep on hearing, reading & remembering it.
Stand firm, don't be dissuaded from believing what Bible says
don't be pushed into relying on another kind of truth.

Keep passing on this word of the gospel and teaching others,
because it is the call of this gospel
that makes saints who they are: brothers loved by God
When we remember who we are by holding on to the gospel,

GOD'S GRACE ENCOURAGES THE WORK OF HIS SAINTS

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father,
who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through
grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work
and word.

Does eating lutefisk and lefse on holidays make you Norwegian
or do some people do just because of who they are?
Does voting or paying taxes or obeying laws make you a citizen
or is it something you do because of who you are?
So, does what you do make you who you are
or does who you are cause you to do what you do?
We no longer live in a culture where your family heritage
determines what language you speak or what job you do,
but as saints, our words and our work are determined by
what God's love has made us to be.

This week members of this congregation are going to be
thinking about & writing down spiritual life plans
for what they will say and what they will do
and getting ready to turn them in in worship next Sunday.
These plans include group worship & receiving the sacrament,
holding to God's word in Bible study & personal devotions,
talking to God in prayer & to others about the gospel
living in right moral relationships with God and others
helping others with encouragement and service
and supporting the church's work with leadership and giving.
Doing these things is not what makes God love us.

This is not what makes us members of this church
and of the community of Saints
but it is who we are as dearly loved children in God's family
that causes us to live in this way.

What will make us able to carry through on these plans?
It is not just our own determination and efforts.
It is the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father.
His love for us is what empowers or love for others.
His grace is what gives us the good hope for eternity
that makes a difference in our lives starting already now.

His comfort for our hearts & forgiveness makes us able
to keep going even when we stumble or fall short.

Word for comfort in these verses is also means encouragement
We accomplish nothing without the constant encouragement
of knowing God is with us, working in us & through us.
Paul is saying, don't give up on good words & good work
because God keeps on truly loving and helping you
and because God himself who makes your words & work
effective instead of worthless.

At this All Saints family reunion, we listen in on the conversation
between the saints now living in heaven
and we learn something about ourselves.

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beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be
saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To
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