

When we read the Bible, over and over again, we're going to discover contrasts.

- Good vs Evil;
- Light vs Darkness;
- wisdom vs foolishness

But sometimes we **don't** notice the contrasts, because we're not looking wide enough. It's easy to notice a contrast, when it's within one or two sentences, whereas sometimes the contrasts are spread out over paragraphs, and sometimes over chapters. And because we have a habit of only reading a little bit at a time, sometimes we miss them.

And today could be one of those times, because there's a very powerful contrast at play here.

We're working our way through Paul's 2nd letter to the Thessalonians. And in the bit we studied last week, Paul was trying to reassure the Thessalonians, "Don't be worried that the 2nd coming of Jesus has come-and-gone without you noticing, and he reminds them that there's a couple of things that had to happen **before** Jesus returns."

And he talked about "the rebellion", and how the Man of Lawlessness (antichrist) had to appear before Jesus would return.

And the most surprising thing (at least, it was surprising for some of us), is that although the Man of Lawlessness is the doing of Satan (& empowered by Satan), it's **God** who sends him – it is **God** who sends this powerful delusion...

And God's purpose, is so that those who don't love the truth, and who **do** take pleasure in unrighteousness, will be deceived by the Man of Lawlessness (God sends them a delusion).

It's not that they **can't** believe – it's that they don't love truth. They're very happy to believe a lie, but not the beautiful truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ....

And so those who will be deluded and worship the Man of Lawlessness, are those who **don't** love the truth, and **do** pleasure in unrighteousness. And now here's the contrast:

³ 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...

There's a reason for Paul to give thanks to God for these Christian "**Brothers**", (and it's a reason for us to give thanks for all our brothers & sisters in Christ) – They are **beloved by the Lord** – Why? Because God **chose** them...

Why should I love you? Because you are the beloved of God, and He chose you. Why should you love me? I don't know why, but I am the beloved of God, and He chose me.

One of the wonderful doctrines of Salvation, is what we call "pre-destination". That means, God started all this... God chose us.

God chose to make known His Gospel, to you and I. God **chose** us, that we would get the chance, to hear a preacher (maybe this very day), who would share the Gospel with us, so that we might be saved...

That's wonderful...

Now, depending what version of the Bible we read, the next few words (v13) in your Bible, might be different to what we read.

ESV: because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved

KJV: God hath from the beginning, chosen you to salvation

American SV: God chose you from the beginning, unto salvation

RSV: because God chose you from the beginning to be saved

But:

NRSV: because God chose you as the firstfruits for salvation

NIVcurrent: God chose you as firstfruits to be saved

But:

NIV1984: because from the beginning, God chose you to be saved

More recent translations are saying **God chose you as the firstfruits**

Older translations are saying **God chose you from the beginning**

Why the discrepancy? Surely the older ones should be more trusted. Well maybe, but not the older “English” translations – the older original documents.

You see, the bibles we read today, are translations from the ancient Hebrew/Greek. But the ancient Greek Documents we have, aren't originals either... A letter would be written, and then another church would copy it, so that they could read it, and then somebody else would copy that...

Are you with me? There are not printing presses, and so what we have, are handwritten copies of copies of copies... And some of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts differ. Minor differences, but they're important...

In the Greek, the difference is a “space” and “one letter at the end”... “ἀπαρχὴν (aparchēn) (firstfruits), is very similar to ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (ap' archēs) (from the beginning of time). Now, we don't know which is most correct. The earlier English translators picked “from the beginning”... But later translators have noted that nowhere else, has Paul ever used that phrase, whereas he talks about firstfruits quite often.

Which one's correct? We don't know, so I'm going to tell you the meaning of both of them...

God chose us (from the beginning of time), to be saved... Isn't that wonderful... God's whole plan of salvation – it wasn't a freak accident... God **knew** that His creation (all people) would rebel against Him, and yet He created us anyway, and He planned to send His Son, to die so that God could be, who God is: Loving; merciful; gracious; forgiving; Saviour... And by believing in Him, we could be forgiven...

God knew that **I** would sin against Him... But before the beginning of time, He chose that I would be born into a Christian family, and that I would hear the Gospel preached, that I might believe the truth and be saved...

God knew that **you** would sin against Him... But before the beginning of time, He chose that you, somehow, would hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ being preached, that **you** might believe the truth and be saved...

Praise God... We've got a lot to give thanks to God about, don't we...

What about the other documents? **God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved...** What does that mean???

Well, "firstfruits" is a sacrificial term. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits, were the first of the harvest, set apart for God... The majority, was retained for everyday consumption, but the "firstfruits" were gathered together for God, Holy for God...

And as we look around the world today, the majority do **not** love the truth, and so are not saved... But Christians (Disciples of Jesus) are set apart as holy to God... When you became a Christian, you were set apart for God, (to be holy). God chose you to be His and to be holy... And this fits in very well, with what Paul goes on to talk about being “sanctified”... (we’ll get to that shortly).

Now, one of the debates that people like to argue about in the Christian church (and I wish we wouldn’t), revolves around free-will...

- Do we have free-will, when it comes to believing in God???
- Does God choose me? or do I choose Him???

And I don’t know why people have these sorts of debates – they’re fruitless... God chooses us, but **we** have a choice as well. We have a choice in how we **respond** to God...

And throughout our reading today, we see the work of God, and we see the part that we **humans** play, in the work of God.

God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Sanctification – that’s a very religious sounding word, but it simply means, to be made holy... And this is something that only the holy one can do.. If I, as a sinful person, try to make myself holy, I just become even more unholy...

It’s only God, who can make us holy....

Now, sanctification (us becoming holy), it **begins** with our initial forgiveness... Alright, we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we confess our sins to God, and He washes us; He purifies us – He makes us holy... And this is what Baptism signifies – putting to death the old sinful man (dying with Christ), and raising up the new.... Like having a bath – our sins are washed away...

And you never sin again, right???? Wrong...

Or am I the only impure one here? Am I the only one who continues to sin against God, and against my brother???

And so, “sanctification”, is what God continues to do in us, as we live day by day in the Lord... When we pray, “Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit.”, what does He do? He fills us with His Holy Spirit...

What’s the evidence that we’re saved? What’s the evidence that we’re filled with His Holy Spirit??? Not the **gifts** of the Spirit – that’s not the evidence, because we know that those can be counterfeit.

It’s the **fruit** of the Spirit – the very character of Christ, developing in us. In baptism, we put to death the old man/woman, and Christ and His character, comes alive in us, through His Holy Spirit:.... Love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; self-control...

And fruit, is something that develops and grows. As we continue to walk with Christ, and as we continue to repent of

everything that is wicked in us, He will continue to transform us, and make us more and more like Christ. And if, as I live day by day, I am **not** becoming more like Christ, there is something seriously, seriously wrong in my relationship with God

Now, what's the goal of this? Sanctification will continue until the day we die, **or** until the Day of The Lord, when Christ returns...

The purpose? For the glory of Christ...

1:10 when He comes on that day, to be glorified in His saints....

Are there any "saints" here? Saints means "holy ones". How are we made holy? Washed by the blood of Jesus, and sanctified by indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

You and I, being transformed to become holy, is what glorifies Jesus...

It makes you want to be even more and more holy, doesn't it – knowing that this is what glorifies Jesus...

And this, is the contrast.

The wicked, don't love the truth, **and** they have pleasure in unrighteousness.

The chosen – the saints, **love** the truth. We **believe** the truth. We've heard the Gospel; we believe the Gospel, and by believing the Gospel, we are saved... **And** it is our pleasure to live in righteousness. Why? Because it brings glory to Christ.

- “Calling”, is what God does
God calls us;
- “Believing”, is what we do
We believe the truth of the Gospel of Jesus;
- “Sanctifying”, is done by the Spirit
(God does the sanctifying);

and this brings glory to Christ.

BTW, we share in the glory of Christ... God makes us holy, which gives Jesus glory, but we share in the glory of Christ at His coming.

Alright, so:

- “Calling”, is what God does;
- “Believing”, is what we do;
- “Sanctifying”, is done by the Spirit (God does the sanctifying);

but there's more:

Believing isn't a once-only event. Believing, is an ongoing action...

V¹⁵ 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.

In other words, if we are saved by belief in the truth, we'd better stick with the truth, and hold fast, to what Paul calls "the traditions"...

Oh, some people hate the thought of traditions... *In fact, in some churches, you'd better not sit in the same pew 2 weeks in a row, otherwise it will become a tradition your Grandchildren are stuck in.*

Some churches rale against other churches and their traditions... All churches have their traditions... But he's not talking about man-made traditions or preferences in the way we conduct worship... What he's talking about, is "apostolic teaching"...

The apostles, were the ones who learned from Jesus. They followed Jesus, and they were eye-witnesses to His resurrection. These men, were recognised by the Church as having the authority to pass on what they'd learned from Jesus. They passed on the Gospel by word-of-mouth, and by writing letters... And today, what they taught is now recorded in the New Testament of our Bibles...

That's why we have a message every week, not from:

- a Newspaper,
but from the Bible;
- the latest new-release Christian best-seller
but from the Bible;
- the even from the latest prophecy or word of knowledge,
but from the Bible...

Stand firm, and hold fast to what the Apostles taught...

Throughout the ages, there have been many ways the Gospel message has been altered to make it more palatable – more acceptable to a certain audience... And that happens today as well... In some cases, the Gospel gets changed so much, it no longer represents the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that was taught and written down by the Apostles... – it's no longer truth...

Those who are perishing, don't love the truth of the Gospel. Changing the truth, might make it more popular, but it won't help more to be saved.

Righto: 2 more verses. And once again, we see the work of the Trinity: Father, Son & Holy Spirit,, and we see our envelopment, into their work.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself [Son], and God our Father [Father], who loved us and gave us eternal comfort [who's the eternal comforter? Holy Spirit] and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Why do we need comfort??? Well, in chapter 1, he's been talking about the suffering they've been going through... By God's grace, they have been judged worthy to suffer for Jesus.... It's a privilege/honour to suffer for Christ... And our Heavenly Father gives us the comfort of the Holy Spirit in that suffering...

So God does this, and God establishes us, into His work...

Sadly, we are living in an age of what I call: 'consumer Christianity', where the church is a service that's provided for me.

That's not the way it's supposed to be. If we're consumers, we're missing out. The act of God (through His grace), is to establish us, into His work... (Grace & Works – they always go together) Paul calls it "**every good work and word**".

He establishes us in faith, **and** into His mission in good work and good word...

In other words, we believe the truth, let's live it, and let's preach it...

What's the difference between an established Christian and an immature Christian???

An immature Christian watches others; An established Christian lives their faith by loving others, and shares their faith... And this, for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank You that You loved us so much,
that You gave Your life as a ransom for many.

Heavenly Father,
We thank You that You chose us;
and chose that we should hear the Gospel and be
saved.

We thank You for the gift of faith.
And we pray, that we would stand strong in the faith;
That we would stand firm, and hold to what the
Apostles taught.

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 [our] hearts
and establish them in every good work and word.

Amen.