

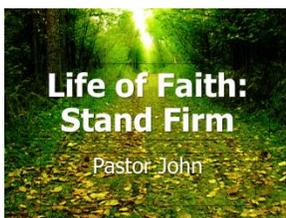
Life of Faith: Standing Firm

November 6, 2016

2nd Thessalonians 2: 1-5 and 13-17

¹When our Lord Jesus returns, we will be gathered up to meet him. So I ask you, my friends, ²not to be easily upset or disturbed by people who claim that the Lord has already come. They may say that they heard this directly from the Holy Spirit, or from someone else, or even that they read it in one of our letters. ³But don't be fooled! People will rebel against God. Then before the Lord returns, the wicked one who is doomed to be destroyed will appear. ⁴He will brag and oppose everything that is holy or sacred. He will even sit in God's temple and claim to be God. ⁵Don't you remember that I told you this while I was still with you?

¹³My friends, the Lord loves you, and it is only natural for us to thank God for you. God chose you to be the first ones to be saved. His Spirit made you holy, and you put your faith in the truth. ¹⁴God used our preaching as his way of inviting you to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵My friends, that's why you must remain faithful and follow closely what we taught you in person and by our letters. ¹⁶God our Father loves us. He is kind and has given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope. We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father ¹⁷will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing.



The opening verses today certainly speak to our times, don't they? "*People will rebel against God*" was the line in verse three. As we look around, there is no shortage of those who

are living in rebellion to God and God's ways. Verse three goes on to speak of the "*wicked one*" who is doomed appearing and deceiving many people. Verse four goes on to tell of the wicked one opposing all that is holy or sacred. At times, it sure does feel like this, doesn't it? Jesus asks them to remember that He had foretold that all of this would come to pass. It does not make it any easier, does it? When we talk of standing firm in our faith, it is a task that is definitely made more difficult by the world around us. So, let us pray.

To understand how we can stand firm in our faith, we must first begin by understanding what all works against us as we strive to stand firm in our faith. The place to begin has to be Satan. The great deceiver works ceaselessly to separate us from God. Sometimes Satan whispers to us, telling us we are not good enough to deserve God's love or forgiveness. Sometimes the whispers cause us to doubt ourselves and fear keeps us from acting as Christ's witness in the world. Sometimes Satan tempts us by telling us that we really do deserve that job promotion or that new four-wheeler or that appreciation from our spouse. Sometimes Satan busies himself by filling our mind with gossip or judgmental thoughts. Whatever the case, he is always working to distract us from our faith, to drive a wedge between us and God. Sin separates us from God.



Yes, there are many ways that Satan works to separate us from God and to help us to allow sin to enter into our lives. Let's be clear though: Satan can tempt us, but it is still our choice to allow that temptation to grow and to eventually lead to

sin and separation. I believe that Satan speaks loudest today through the voice of the world, through the media and through our ever-changing culture. Satan has been working since day one to promote the message that man is god.

It began by convincing Adam and Eve to take that bite so that they could know what God knew, so that they could be equal to God. Satan has been working ever since to convince



mankind that we are God's equal. Through slow and steady progress, Satan has been developing this idea. Today the world has become a me-first, just-do-it-if-it-makes-you-feel-good world. Our world expects instant gratification. Our world tells us to promote oneself above and over all others. One sees this in school, in sports, in movies, in music, in the ultra-competitive job markets, in advertisements for a slew of products. One has to step back and wonder at times, is there any room for God in this world? How does one even begin to decipher God's voice from all of the noise the world makes and the clever lies that Satan whispers to us? The things of this world seek to pull us in. Satan is always working to whisper in our ears the lies that the world wants to sell.



But God shouts right back at Satan's lies. In our reading from 2nd Thessalonians, we are reminded of the future promise that one day Jesus will return and that the faithful will be "*gathered up to meet Him.*" In Haggai, we see the current promise or the promise that is now. In Haggai, we are called to remember the times in our lives when God reigned and was present and to recognize God's glory now, present with us every day.

Reading from Haggai, chapter two:

³ Does anyone remember how glorious this temple used to be? Now it looks like nothing. ⁴ But cheer up! Because I, the LORD All-Powerful, will be here to help you with the work, ⁵ just as I promised your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt. Don't worry. My Spirit is right here with you. ⁶ Soon I will again shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake the nations, and their treasures will be brought here. Then the brightness of my glory will fill this temple. ⁸ All silver and gold belong to me, ⁹ and I promise that this new temple will be more glorious than the first one."

In the swirl of the noise of the world and through the clever lies of Satan, God calls us to remember that He is right here with us. Verse five read, "*Don't worry.*



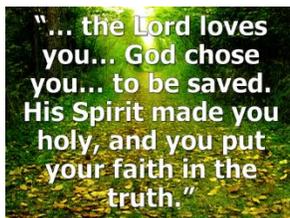
My Spirit is right here with you." It is hard not to worry at times. We are told not to worry because God's promise is to be right here with us. God is not only some past God or only some future God, but God is the God of the present, of the

here and now. God is present. God's Spirit will be right here with us. Counter to the whispers of Satan and to the lies of the world stands the Holy Spirit.

God's presence is always right by our side, helping us to stand firm in our faith.

This passage from Haggai and our scripture reading from 2nd Thessalonians both speak of sharing in the glory of God and of Jesus Christ. In Haggai we have the promise of a new temple and in Revelation we again hear the promise of a new heaven and earth that will be more glorious than the original temple. We have a great hope in the eternity that will one day come, where God's glory will shine.

But right now, our very real struggle is in the here and now. Satan works to keep us from ever getting to this future hope and eternal promise. Our faith works to help us realize this glory in the here and now.



Reading again from verse 13, Jesus reminds us, "*the Lord loves you... God chose you... to be saved. His Spirit made you holy, and you put your faith in the truth.*" We are chosen by

God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and made to be holy. We are called to put our faith in these truths. This is where standing firm in our faith begins. When we know that Jesus loves us, that God chose us, and that the Spirit makes us holy, then we can put our faith in these truths. When we live daily with these truths, we are better able to pay attention to Jesus in the here and now.

Verse fifteen reminds us of the how we do this: "*You must remain faithful and follow closely what we taught you in person and by our letters.*" For us, as

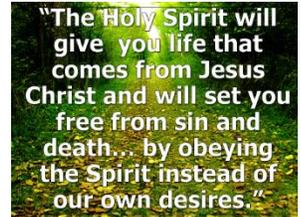
disciples nearly two thousand years later, we are still taught in person by the words we read in the Bible. The living Word of God remains alive and active and instructs us in how we are to live out our faith. To live by the writings we find in the



Scriptures, we must read and study the Word daily. These words must not remain words, however, but they must be lived out daily in our lives. The Word of God must be the foundation of our lives.

As we live out our faith, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit helps us to remember and to live out the Word of God. The Spirit helps us

in our battle with Satan and with the lies of the world. The Holy Spirit is what leads us from temptation and sin and into a life of faith and obedience. In Romans 8, from verses two and four, we are reminded of the gift that the Spirit is to us: *"The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death... by obeying the Spirit instead of our own desires."* When we live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we live as if we were free from sin and death. We live for Christ. This is hard, but with the presence of the Holy Spirit we do have a chance to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. The more we read and study the Word of God, the better we are able to recall the reminders found in the Word and to recall the example that Jesus set for us. It is through our faithful dedication to spending time in the Word that the Spirit works best. The Spirit cannot remind us of the Word of God if we do not spend time there ourselves. The Spirit cannot remind us of what we do not know.



"The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Jesus Christ and will set you free from sin and death... by obeying the Spirit instead of our own desires."



The Spirit works in other ways as well. In Romans 8, we are reminded that the Spirit intercedes for us. From verses 26 and 27, *"In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us... the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. All of our thoughts are known to God... as the Spirit prays for God's people."* The Spirit is constantly at work on our behalf, even when we are unaware of it. The Spirit is constantly praying for you and I, constantly bringing our needs before the throne of God. We have an Advocate, always pleading our case. What a gift!

The world seeks to draw us into the desires of the flesh, into pursuing the things that the world says matter. Satan works all the time to distract us from God and to create impure thoughts and selfish desires within us. It is only through the presence of God's Spirit in our lives, through the witness we find in the Word of God, and through faithful obedience to the Word and the voice of the Spirit that we can live daily for our faith. It is a daily battle. Again, we are reminded of God's role and Jesus' role with us to live faithfully day by day. From the reading today in 2nd Thessalonians, verses sixteen and seventeen, we read, "*We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing.*" This too is our prayer.



"We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing."



How do we stand firm in our faith? How do we live in the world, yet remain of God's world? It begins by being daily in God's presence. We must spend time reading and studying God's word every day. We are also in God's presence when we pray. Each day we must connect with God in prayers to offer our thanksgiving, to seek God's guidance and direction, to share our needs, and to express our love for God. Time in the Word and time in prayer is reinforced by the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives – daily guiding, leading, directing, convicting, and reminding us of how we are to live out our faith. Faith in God and Jesus Christ must be our foundation. We are in the world, so we must recognize the lies and deceptions that Satan uses to pull us away from God. If we are not aware of these things, Satan can eat away at our foundation. It is a daily battle. So we must daily be in connection with God and Jesus through the

reading and study of the Word and through our prayers. We must be in constant connection to the power of the Holy Spirit, which is always at work in our lives. These practices and presence assures us of a solid foundation built upon the rock that is Jesus Christ. This is where our life of faith must begin. When Jesus is our sure foundation, we will be able to stand firm.

I ask you to direct your attention to the screens. This short video is a great summary of what we have been talking about today. Please enjoy.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

1. Satan works to separate us from God. Where do you feel most tempted or most easily led astray by Satan or the lies of this world?
2. When in your life has God and Jesus been your “sure foundation”? How does recalling this experience lead you to increased faith and dedication?
3. Reflect on your personal faith practices. How does your daily time in the Word and in prayer help you to stand firm in your faith? Or... how can you commit to finding time each day for God to better stand firm in your faith?
4. The Holy Spirit is ever present in our lives. What helps you to tune into and to obey the whispers and nudges of the Holy Spirit in your life?