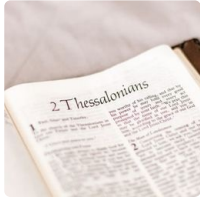


OpenTheo

2 Thessalonians 2-3



2 Thessalonians - Steve Gregg

In this analysis of 2 Thessalonians 2-3, Steve Gregg explores the concept of the rapture and the rise of the little horn in Daniel. He challenges the belief in a separate time for the rapture and suggests that martyrdom has been a common occurrence throughout church history. Gregg also delves into the idea of God's election and the role of the Church in its changing definition over time. Overall, his examination seeks to provide a fresh perspective on biblical passages and their relevance to the lives of believers today.

Transcript

We'll now pick up where we left off yesterday in our study of 2 Thessalonians, and we should have no problem completing the book in this session. Yesterday we took chapter 1 and the major portion of chapter 2. In chapter 1 there wasn't any major doctrinal treatment of anything, although chapter 2 got to be rather in-depth. In chapter 1 we did find that Paul, almost offhand, without any attempt to address controversies on the matter of eschatology, did give us a clue as to when the rapture occurs.

If we're just to take his word at face value, in chapter 1 in verses 7 and 8 he indicated that the rest of the believer, the believer entering into his rest, his final rest, which either happens at death or at the rapture. I mean, if you die before the rapture, you'll enter into rest then, according to the book of Revelation. And according to Isaiah 55, 57, 1 and 2, the person, the righteous man who dies, enters into his rest at that time.

And it's also the case, of course, that if we don't die before the Lord comes, then at the rapture we'll enter into a cessation of the tension and the persecution we face in this world. So, this entering into a rest, for many people is at death, but for others it will be when Jesus returns and raptures the church. But Paul identifies that event as taking place when Jesus appears from heaven with his mighty angels, inflaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In other words, the visible, tangible appearing of Christ in judgment at the end of the world is the time when Paul says we anticipate being relieved of the present tension of persecution and so forth. He does not see the rapture, therefore, as happening at a

separate time than this, but at the same time as that. Now, he doesn't address the rapture question at all, at least, well, maybe only offhand in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians.

Mainly he talks about, I guess he does talk about the rapture question, and he raises the issue that anyone who thinks the day of the Lord has already come is pretty badly mistaken, since there are some things that must happen first, before that. He says, now I beseech you concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him. And I suggested that there is a possibility that the expression our gathering together unto him might not refer to the rapture, and could refer to something more like the fellowship of believers gathering together, but it seems in the context that since he's talking about eschatology, and since he has said in the first epistle, he gave the teaching about the rapture in the first epistle to these same people, that they would have understood his statement, the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto him as being a reference to our gathering together to meet the Lord in the air at the coming of the Lord.

He says that can't happen until certain other things happen first. There must be a falling away, or an apostasy, and there must be the manifestation of the man of sin. Last session, I talked at some length at the end of our session, and went over time by about 15 minutes, talked about the man of sin and the various attempts that have been made to identify who the man of sin is, and the twin problem of identifying what it is that hinders the rise of the man of sin, because Paul spoke very vaguely about both of these issues.

He said there is somebody called the man of sin expected. This expression is not found anywhere else in the Bible, and therefore we have to ask ourselves if there is some other teaching in the Bible on the man of sin, which passages was it, were they, that Paul alluded to? My conclusion was, and most commentators I think would agree regardless of their eschatology, he at least has Daniel chapter 7 in mind, simply because what is said of the little horn there parallels so closely what is said of the man of sin by Paul. Furthermore, the little horn in Daniel 7, if you consider the timing of his arrival, in Daniel 7 he arises out of the Roman Empire, out of the fourth beast, and apparently upon the ruins of the fourth beast, which to Paul would be something that he would be looking forward to as possibly very near, because of course Paul and his generation lived during the reign of the fourth beast, and therefore would anticipate the coming of the little horn upon the ruins of the Roman Empire.

I told you that while there are many interpretations of it, the consensus of all the earliest Christian writers, both in the first three centuries of the Church, the Church Fathers in other words, and of all the Reformers, was that that which hindered the man of sin from arising was the Roman Empire's presence, and that upon the fall of the Roman Empire there would arise this little horn or the man of sin. And the Reformers in particular

identified that man of sin and indicated that they believed that this prediction had come true, that when the Roman Empire fell there was a system, and some people say, well how can you know when we talk about the papacy as possibly man of sin, people say well why would the papacy be called a man, singular, when in fact the Popes have been many scores or hundreds of Popes. But then you know Jesus, the body of Christ, is referred to as a man.

Paul says in Ephesians 2.15 that God has taken the believing Jew and the believing Gentile, broken down the middle wall, a partition between them, and of the two made one new man, meaning the Church. Ephesians 2.15, that the combination of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body are called a new man. It seems, although not all would agree with me on this, but it seems to me that Paul speaks of the body, the corporate body of Adam as a man, as the old man.

Of course there are different views among evangelicals as to what is meant by the old man and the new man, but there can be little doubt what Paul means by the new man, since he has identified very clearly in Ephesians 2.15 as the body of Christ. As far as the old man, different views persist, but it seems to me in light of all the data that the old man is a reference to the corporate body of Adam. In other words, Paul is not unfamiliar with, and we should not be unfamiliar with, Paul's use of the term man to refer to really a corporate entity that involves many individuals or a class of men, and therefore it is not impossible, at least, that Paul could have, when he spoke of the man, be thinking not so much of one human individual as a group of men or a class of men or a solidarity of men who would succeed one another in a particular position or office.

And at least that's how the Reformers had no problem understanding it that way, whether they were right or not. As I said, we cannot really be 100% certain, but we should weigh the evidence between that and other possible views. I said one of the views was that the hindrance to the rise of the man of sin is and was the archangel Michael.

I've heard some people teach that based on Daniel 12.1 and 2. Most of these people understand the man of sin to be a last days antichrist who will arise yet future. That is, people of this class have identified him over the years as, well, at different times, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini. All of these and many others have been identified as the man of sin by various Christians who looked for a last days individual to be a world dictator who would be opposed to Christ.

In more recent times, there have been Christian writers that have published books identifying Henry Kissinger as the antichrist man of sin. Of course, very few people hold that view anymore, though when Kissinger was very popular, there were some who thought very likely he could hold that role. And there was a time when a certain teacher on tapes was being, his tapes were being distributed throughout the world, was saying

that Jimmy Carter was the man of sin.

I have no doubt that some people recently thought Saddam Hussein may be the man of sin or whatever, but... What's that? I heard that very much. Somebody said that. I mean, obviously during the Gulf crisis there was a lot of speculation about Saddam Hussein's role.

I don't know if I ever heard anyone say he is the antichrist, but certainly that was rolling around the back of the mind of some people, and I wouldn't be surprised if certain people just came out and said so, because it has not been, historically it has not been unusual for Christians to come out and say, this is the guy, and to have elaborate mathematical calculations to prove that somehow this person's name could be construed, if you take an Arabic spell backwards, as 666. You have to get the Sanskrit version of his name, and multiply it by 3 and get 7, because those are both, and when you take away 7 from 3 you get minus 4, and then you have to, well, you know, whatever. This is the way that some Bible teachers prefer to handle the text.

I personally don't. I don't think that's responsible, and I do not believe that the case is a strong one in favor of a future antichrist. Now I don't, if you say, are you saying there's not going to be an antichrist? I can't say that, how do I know? All I'm saying is, in the verses that are used to prove that there is a future antichrist, I am not convinced that those verses teach that.

Now, I certainly would be in no position to deny that there might be some individual in our time or in some future time who will gain world power and will resist the church and persecute the church. I don't want to put you on any false hopes that there won't be such a person. Maybe there will, maybe there won't.

All I can say is, I don't know that the Bible teaches that there is. Because when you think of the subject of antichrist, as I said, first of all, the word antichrist is used only in a generic sense, and only by the first and second epistles of John. You don't find the word antichrist in the Bible, outside of those epistles, and in both places you only find it used generically.

Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ, the same person is an antichrist and a deceiver. So the word antichrist is never used as a technical term for an individual in the Bible. So that term doesn't teach a future antichrist.

The beast of revelation is often thought to be the antichrist, and as I said yesterday, there are far better reasons to identify the beast of revelation as a system or a nation, simply because the imagery is borrowed from Daniel chapter 7, where all four beasts in that chapter represent nations rather than individuals. And even the evidence within that revelation would suggest not a man, but a nation or a group. So the beast is often used.

Then of course you've got the little horn of Daniel 7 and the little horn of Daniel 8. There's two different little horns in Daniel. Usually it's the one in Daniel 8 that is thought to be the antichrist. No, no, I'm sorry.

The one in chapter 7 is. In chapter 8 the little horn is clearly Antiochus Epiphanes, a man who rose and fell within the second century BC and is no longer looking for. But in chapter 7 of Daniel, the little horn there is the one that we have said is probably the same one that Paul was talking about as the man of sin.

And those who think the man of sin is a future antichrist would also say the same thing about the little horn of Daniel. But how do they justify this? How could they say that the little horn of Daniel is a future antichrist when it's very plain that he rises out of the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire is gone? Well, the dispensational position, which I only name them because they're distinct in their teaching on the subject, they believe there will be a revived Roman Empire in the last days from which the man of sin will arise. Why do they believe this? Because it's quite plain that the little horn arises out of the Roman Empire.

And since they don't believe that he rose from the past and there is no Roman Empire today, they have to postulate without biblical grounds that there will be a revival of the Roman Empire. And from this revived Roman Empire he will come. And this, some of you have probably heard this idea.

Hal Limsey's book, which has sold over 20 million copies, *The Late Great Planner*, which has made its way into most Christian homes and is available even in secular bookstores, it has had a big time impact on the thinking of Christians. He was teaching a dispensational view, and it was one of the basic assumptions of his book that there's a revived Roman Empire and it's to be identified with the European economic community and the common market and so forth. And dispensationalists are still saying this, although when Hal Limsey's book came out there were only seven nations in the common market, and there needed to be ten by his interpretation.

And three more had application to join and said, oh look, seven plus three, that makes ten, that's right. That's the ten nation revival of the Roman Empire. But as it turned out, thirteen nations joined all together.

And now they've got it working out, oh thirteen, that's the right number now because the little horn has to have root three and then it'll bring it back down to ten and so forth. You know, when it gets up above thirteen I'm not sure exactly what they're going to do with that. I remember reading a book that my father had when I was a child, which was written by a Bible prophecy teacher and a dispensationalist who wrote between World War I and World War II.

And I'm not real clear on the historical period, but apparently after World War I, maybe

no one here is old enough to really remember that properly, or to say, there was some League of Nations, maybe it was even the League of Nations, I don't know, some group of nations in Europe that had thirteen member nations. And I remember that a book written by dispensationalists, his name, well I won't give his name, but I remember his name, my father had it on his bookshelf when I read it as a child. He identified this group of nations, which existed only between World War I and World War II and doesn't exist anymore, as the ten nation confederacy of the revived Roman Empire that dispensationalists anticipate.

And in his book he said, now I realize my reader may object that the Bible talks about a ten nation confederacy and yet there are thirteen nations in this particular coalition. He says that that's the diabolical thing. The devil doesn't want us to recognize it as the ten nation confederacy of the Bible, so he's made it thirteen nations instead of ten.

Well, it just shows how willing dispensationalists are to manipulate Scripture and current events to fit in any which way. I think I mentioned before that before the Soviet Union dissolved, the dispensationalists were commonly saying that the might and the power of the communist system in Russia was an obvious fulfillment of certain prophecies that they interpreted to be in the Bible about Russia. But now that the Soviet Union's dissolved and there's not one of those nations that could be possibly a serious threat to the United States or to world peace or probably even to Israel, they say, I mean, they said, this fits perfectly into our understanding of prophecy.

They never anticipated it. Their system of prophecy never anticipated the dissolving of the Soviet Union. I never read a dispensational book written before 1990 that ever made any, the slightest prediction that the Soviet Union would have to dissolve.

But as soon as it happened, all the dispensational teachers on the radar said, this is exactly what prophecy said was going to happen. The thing is, they never knew that prophecy said it was going to happen until it happened, which doesn't make prophecy very helpful, I guess, because you don't know what it means until after it's fulfilled anyway. But the point is, what prophecy was fulfilled by this? They'll find one.

They can always find something and somehow force current events into it because they're so committed to the belief that somehow we have to be living in the last days, the coming of the Lord must be immediate, and we must be able to find some proof of it in modern events. Just, this does not strike me as responsible biblical treatment, and since the belief in a future Antichrist usually is identified with that camp, that is, that the man of sin that Paul talks about, the little horn of Daniel, belongs to a future revived Roman Empire of the last days and so forth. It is an individual who will be a world dictator and pursue Christians and so forth.

That view to me arises out of what I would not perceive as very responsible biblical treatment. I am not inclined to that view any longer. Now, at the same time, I don't want

to be mopping the floor saying, boy, I was getting scared about this Antichrist.

Now it looks like we've got, if the Bible doesn't say there's a future Antichrist, then I guess we'll be okay. Don't count on it. I mean, throughout church history, the church has been persecuted by Antichrists.

I mean, for 70 years, the church was persecuted in Russia. For 200 years, the church was persecuted by Roman Emperors. For 1,000 years, the Christians were persecuted by the Papacy.

Christians as well as Jews were persecuted in Nazi Germany. Muslim countries still persecute Christians and kill them sometimes. I mean, whether there's going to be a future Antichrist or not, I don't see how it makes any difference at all for the fate of Christians.

So many Western Christians who have never known anything of persecution have come to assume that persecution is a weird and unusual thing, a cruel and unusual punishment, which God would never allow to happen to his people, because we live in some kind of a time space war here. We're out of touch with the world and out of touch with history. And we've never had anyone try to kill us.

We haven't had anyone come to our door and take our kids away and put them in institutions to teach them communism and to haul us off to mental institutions because we believe in God. We've never had to hide out and have meetings. So, I mean, it just seems like to anticipate a time when we'd be persecuted is, oh, God could never allow that to happen.

Certainly we must be raptured first before that happens. It's just a view that's out of touch, just out of touch with reality. The reality is Christians have always been persecuted.

Martyrdom has been a common phenomenon throughout church history, and it's a very, what we live in is a very unusual thing, a bubble, a little place in the world where for the last couple hundred years there hasn't been any persecution of Christians. And that's because we've lived our whole lives within that bubble. We've come to think that we somehow should be exempt from persecution, and that it's strange that people are persecuted.

But what I'm saying is a lot of people, especially American Christians, are terrified when they hear that I don't believe in a preacher or a rapture because they assume there is a tribulation and an Antichrist and that he will persecute and kill godly people. And if we happen to be there at the time of the kill us and they think, oh, God could never allow that to happen, God would never allow his people to be killed by bad guys. I mean, that's really what these people apparently think.

Most people who argue for a preacher or a rapture are arguing emotionally, not biblically, as if you're familiar with the argument, you know. There is no biblical text that teaches a preacher or a rapture. There are a number of texts that seem to totally make it impossible to believe in a preacher or a rapture.

But you can take something out of context and make it say whatever you want it to say, apparently, if you have a strong emotional reason to be committed to it. And what makes people strongly emotionally committed to the idea of a preacher, a biblical rapture is they're scared. And they think that God must get us out of here before it really gets difficult.

God wouldn't want us to go through deep waters and persecution. Maybe we have to lay down our lives, maybe even lose our homes and our jobs and so forth, our way of life. But that's, like I said, that's simply ignoring reality and history.

Now, if by anything I've said you've come to say, well, maybe there isn't a future Antichrist, that doesn't in any way suggest that the church won't be persecuted or that you won't have to die a martyr or whatever. Even if I don't see a biblical teaching that there is a future man who will rule the whole world and persecute the Christians the world over, that doesn't mean that there won't be some time in the future where there's no place safe. I mean, most countries in the world in history have persecuted Christians, and it could easily become the case all over the world, whether there's a world decanter or not.

So we have to be prepared for tribulation, we have to be prepared for martyrdom, regardless of our eschatology. And even if we were post-millennial, you know, the people who believe the world is going to get better and better and eventually the whole world is going to be Christianized and it's going to be nirvana on earth for Christians, even if I believe that, I have no guarantee that that utopia is going to come in my lifetime. If I believed in this post-millennial idea that everything is going to be groovy just before Jesus comes back - that's a word that most of you have never heard - if I believed that, there's still no guarantee that's happening within the next century or two.

I may still live and die in a period of persecution before any of that begins to take place. So I mean, regardless of your eschatology, you have to be prepared to suffer persecution. And therefore, belief in a tribulation or in an Antichrist or in a pre-trib rapture or no pre-trib rapture really makes no difference in that respect.

What does it matter? You know, when I did believe in the tribulation and the Antichrist, and when I taught that, I taught it in the Bible, and even when I was a pre-tribulation rapture believer, it was never out of fear of going through the tribulation. When I eventually changed my view of the post-trib, it did involve me in an emotional change. You know, like, uh-oh, now I have to brace myself for persecution because I'm going to go through the tribulation.

When I was pre-trib, I was ready for persecution. I mean, I relished reading books like Fox's Book of Martyrs, and I relished reading Richard Wurmbrand's story, and I thought, maybe I'll go be a missionary behind the Iron Curtain and maybe die in prison and get tortured and stuff like that. I mean, I really did.

I mean, I sincerely believed that the church would be raptured before the tribulation. But hey, I was ready to be martyred, and when I later began to think we're going to go through the tribulation, it really made no difference to me. I mean, so what? What's the difference between going through this alleged tribulation and dying a martyr, or going, you know, into China and dying a martyr? The Christians who were under Mount Sitton, to them it might as well have been a tribulation.

He might as well have been the Antichrist. What difference, what could any Antichrist do worse than what was done? So we need to keep things in perspective here. I do not believe that there's any passage of Scripture that teaches clearly that there is a future Antichrist who's going to rule the world.

But that doesn't mean that all the most horrible things imaginable that could happen under an Antichrist won't happen. They may, with or without a world dictator, they may. So we have to be prepared for worse than any case.

Now, the most commonly heard interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2 is the dispensational view, which again takes the view that the Antichrist, or the man of sin is a future Antichrist individual. And that which hinders his rise is the presence of the church in the world. This is the view I used to hold.

In fact, when I believed in a preacher of rapture, I had a list of proof texts, and this, this and one other, in my opinion, were the most convincing proof texts for a preacher of rapture. I mean, I just thought, how can you get around this? The man of sin cannot rise until something is removed out of the way. And I was told that the only sensible interpretation is that it's the church, or the Holy Spirit in the church, that hinders the man of sin from rising.

And so it's quite obvious, given that assumption, that, you know, the man of sin cannot rise while the church, or the Holy Spirit, is in the church here. Therefore, obviously, the church has to be raptured first before the man of sin can rise. And that is what you'll hear as an assumed interpretation many times.

Many people have never heard any other interpretation, but that the hindrance is the church. In fact, this Bible I've got on your desk there, Eric. Yes, sir.

It's a good Bible, except it has a few notes in it, which come from a dispensation point of view. And I was looking at 2 Thessalonians in it, and in his notes in 2 Thessalonians, the author doesn't even suggest there's any other interpretations around. He just says, Paul

is talking about the church, the Holy Spirit in the church as a hindrance to the rise of the man of sin.

He doesn't speak of the rapture directly, but he does talk about the need to get the restraining power of the Holy Spirit out of the way. And he acts as if the only conceivable interpretation of this passage is that it is the Holy Spirit hindering the rise of the man of sin. Now, to me, that's not competent teaching.

I mean, certainly that man's been through Bible college, he's got a PhD in theology, he must know there are some other views out there. How could anyone go through a theological seminary and get a doctorate in theology and not be aware that historically Christians have always had a different view than that? You know? And now, as far as I'm concerned, a man is at liberty to choose whatever view he thinks makes sense. I don't fault him for holding the view he holds.

I don't agree with him. I don't think it's the best interpretation of the passage. But what's wrong is that he presents it as if it's the only view Christians have ever held.

And this is so often the case with people on the radio and the books written by dispensations. If they would say, now here's all these different views, and we prefer the dispensational view because it makes more sense in light of these scriptures and we just feel like it better fits the data, I could respect that. I really could.

I mean, I could respectfully disagree with that and say, well, you know, all right, more power to you. I reach different conclusions than you do, but that's okay. But the fact that they almost conceal the fact that the majority of Christians in history have disagreed with them and they basically monopolize the media is what concerns me, their motivations, you know, and makes me wonder about them.

I'm saying that the New King James translates it biased. I mean, only he, capitalized he, who now restrains, until he, capital H, is taken out of the way. I mean, that's biased right there.

Yeah, the New King James translation is biased toward premillennialism and possibly dispensationalism too. You've got to realize that in any Bible translation nowadays, other than like the old Luther translation or Phillips or something like that, the Bibles that are translated now, the new ones, are put out by committees. And usually there's a committee working on each book of the Bible and a particular theology of whoever's the chairman of that committee is definitely going to be brought into the way they interpret that book.

It's possible that some parts of the New King James would not support a pre-trib rapture, but it seems obvious that whoever headed the committee on 2 Thessalonians was a dispensationalist. Yeah, so he capitalizes the pronoun he, assuming that he who

restrains is God or is the Holy Spirit. And that is not an impossible idea, but it is certainly far from established.

I don't know if this question is going to take up a lot of time, but you talked about the man of sin, but you also mentioned apostasy. Do you apply those at the same time? Yeah, thank you. I intended to say something about the apostasy, but I got sort of carried away with the man of sin.

I never really got into that. Paul mentions the apostasy happening, he doesn't say it happens before the rise of the man of sin, but the way he lists it, it sounds like it. It sounds like an apostasy occurs from which arises the man of sin.

If, just for the sake of argument, if we were to take the Reformers' view that the man of sin did refer to the rise of the pathosy, it would not be difficult to identify the apostasy, because just from Church history you will discover that in the 4th and 5th centuries, those centuries when the pathosy was not yet in power but was rising as an institution, it rose upon a polluted foundation of the Church. The Church began to put traditions of men in the place of Scripture, and doctrines that the apostles did not teach became established practices. And, you know, most people who are familiar with Church history believe that there was a general falling away from the purity of the Gospel in the days of Constantine, in particular, which would be, of course, the 4th century, early 4th century.

And if you're not familiar with the period at all, you may recall that until Constantine, who was a Roman emperor, all the previous Roman emperors, well, not all of them, but ten of them, ten major Roman emperors severely persecuted the Church. That kept the Church fairly pure. When the Church is being severely persecuted, people don't join it as a social club.

They only join it if they really believe, if they're really committed, if they're really willing to lay down their lives. And when you've got persecution and a surviving Church, that Church that is surviving is fairly pure in its motivations and usually, preferably, in its doctrine. And in those early years, it was fairly much so.

When Constantine came to power, he was the Roman emperor, and he saw a vision which he interpreted as instructions from God to conquer his enemies through the power of the cross. And he professed a conversion to Christianity. Most historians would just say he was converted to Christianity, but it depends on what you call Christianity.

I mean, about Constantine's time is where the word Christianity became muddled. What makes a person a Christian? Well, of course, until that time, if you were in the Church, you were a Christian, because you wouldn't be in the Church during times of persecution unless you really were a Christian. You'd have no motivation to be there unless you really loved the Lord.

Therefore, being in the Church came to be identified as being a Christian, and rightly so in the first few centuries. However, the Church became institutionalized in the days of Constantine because he made Christianity a legal religion. Eventually, it was made the formal religion of the Roman Empire.

Virtually everybody was in the Church, whether converted or not. There was no cost to be paid. And very soon, the kingdom of God came to be associated with the Roman Empire.

So you have a period of the Holy Roman Empire where it's like the agendas of the kingdom of God were interpreted through politics, you have the Crusades and those kind of things later arose out of that. The idea was that the empire or the Church, which governed the Roman Empire, was the kingdom of God and was like a political kingdom and operated in political ways and people rose to power through political means rather than through spiritual means and so forth. Basically, there was a real falling away from the true faith among those that were called Christians.

So I would say that that fits anyway. I may sound like I'm leaning pretty heavy toward the reformers' position on this, and I do lean in that direction. All I can say is I'm not sure they were right, but it seems like everything fits well into that interpretation, whereas things don't seem to fit as well into some of the other interpretations you have.

Question from audience member Verse 7 you mean? Okay, then he may be revealed? Yeah, I think the restraining means the rising of the man of sin. See, there's a good point right there. I don't know if you understood it the way that I understand it, but if we understand the pathos as an institution as being the man of sin, the pathos arose quite organically out of an institution that existed in the early Church, namely the Bishop of the Church of Rome.

In Peter's day and in Paul's day, there must have been Church leaders in Rome, and eventually whoever was the leader of the Church in Rome began to be regarded as the main leader of the whole Church, since Rome was the main city and the main church in the Empire, whoever was at the top of that church in the sense of leadership and authority tended to have more authority than anyone else in the whole Church worldwide. And eventually, as the centuries rolled on, this person became established more and more as a political power over the Church, and eventually they just changed his name to Pope. The word Pope means father, and it is just a title that was given to persons that used to be the bishops of the Church of Rome.

Eventually the title Bishop of Church of Rome came to be identified with a Pope, and his authority as time went on became more and more political, and more and more carnal power as opposed to spiritual power. And I would say that in Paul's day there already was, of course, leadership of the Church of Rome, but the pathos was being... That politicizing of the office of the Bishop of Rome was being held down by the political

power of the Roman Emperors. The Roman Emperors would not allow any rivals of political power.

Do you think Paul was seeing that as a way to... I think Paul... I'm not sure if Paul knew exactly how it would be fulfilled, but he did say that man or sin would rise in the temple of God, and if we understand that as Paul's typical use of that expression as the Church, then he must have foreseen some corruption arising within the Church. And if, when he said, we know what's hindering him, if what he meant was the Roman Emperors, the presence of the Roman Empire was hindering him, based on Daniel 7, the beast was the Roman Empire, this fourth beast, and then the little horn comes up, then Paul could have put things together, apparently, that... I mean, I think he knew at least this much. If, again, if the Reformers and the Church Fathers were correct in their interpretation, which is not 100% sure, but if they were correct, then we would say that Paul knew, A, that someday the Roman Empire would fall, and whenever it did, this little horn, or the sinful man would arise.

B, he knew that it would be in the Church. And those two things pretty much describe what happened. And so whether he knew exactly how this would happen or not, we don't... I mean, I don't know, but there is the possibility that he had a pretty clear understanding of those things later developed.

If you will make a mention of what I read in the Box of Book of Marks, concerning the vicar of the Pope, was it not Peter first, and then his male descendants after him, speaking of Matthew 6? Right. The rationale for the Pope being the head of the Church comes from the fact that Jesus said to Peter, You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, in Matthew 16, 18. It is a tradition, though it's not stated in Scripture, and in fact there's some good reason to doubt that it ever really happened, but there is a tradition that Peter started the Church in Rome, and that he was the first bishop of the Church of Rome.

Now there's no scriptural support for that, it's just a tradition that may be true or may not be. It seems there's some evidence in Scripture that it might not be true, since the Church in Rome was founded before the Jerusalem Council, and Peter was in Jerusalem at the time of the Jerusalem Council. Whether he had been to Rome and started the Church and had come back or not, the Scripture is silent about it, it seems unlikely.

But anyway, the tradition is that Peter was the first bishop of Rome, and since Jesus gave him, Peter, as they say, the authority to be the rock upon which the Church is built, then that would apply not to Peter as a person but to the office he held. Whoever held the same office he did after his death, his successors in office as bishops of Rome would have the same power. That is, they would see the authority given to Peter as not vested in him personally but in the office that he held as bishop of Rome.

Therefore, whoever held the office of bishop of Rome afterwards would have that power.

And as time went on, the traditions were added to things like papal inviolability. That was not an early teaching of the paps.

The early paps, they didn't teach that they were infallible. That came up later in a later council in more or less recent times. But as time went on, the definition of exactly how much power he had over the Church was modified and expanded upon by church councils and decrees and so forth.

Anyway, let me just say that we have, therefore, a variety of interpretations. Probably the most popular interpretation in the popular evangelical circles is that that which restrains the man of sin is the Church or the Holy Spirit in the Church. And when the Church is taken away in the rapture, then the man of sin, who is a future individual, Antichrist, whom they would also identify as the beast of Revelation and the little horn of Daniel and so forth, that this person then will arise and, in the opinion of those who hold this view, will reign over the world and persecute the Church worldwide for about three and a half years, the latter part of the tribulation period.

So that is the most well-known view, I suppose, now. The historic view is somewhat different, which we've talked about, and there are some miscellaneous other views that are neither that one or the other, but which some people have held. You can, of course, wrestle with that yourself and see which one seems to you to fit the material best.

I know that I have probably in some ways biased you in your opinion, but at the same time, it's kind of hard to avoid biasing people when you comment on Scripture, but you should definitely look critically at each view, including the one that I've presented at length. We now come to verse 13. Paul says, But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Now, that God chose you from the beginning for salvation is a very important, or at least in the eyes of many, a very important passage about election. You are probably aware of the differences of opinion between Calvinists and Arminians on the subject of election. If it is not clear to you, I'd like to summarize very briefly.

The Calvinist view, which is probably the predominant view in the evangelical church, or at least was for many years. I think Arminianism may be gaining more acceptance. But the Calvinist view holds that we are elected, that is chosen by God unconditionally.

That is, God did not view anything that we did or would do as the basis for our being saved, because as a matter of fact, according to Calvinism, there is nothing we could do. The first point of Calvinism is total depravity, which teaches that man is so depraved that absolutely nothing he can do can help himself to move an inch toward God. He is dead in trespasses and sins, and since dead men can do nothing for themselves, therefore we could do nothing for ourselves.

And the next point of Calvinism is unconditional election, which means that since we could do nothing for ourselves at all, not one good thing to move ourselves toward God, we must necessarily have been chosen without any reference to conditions being met, because there's no conditions we could meet. If God chose some to be saved and others not to be saved, he must have just chosen to resuscitate certain people who were dead in sins and not resuscitate others. That is, to give life to some and not give life to others without reference to any conditions met on either part, because there's no conditions they could meet.

They're dead. They're totally depraved. So that if a person even did such a good thing as to have faith in Jesus, that faith itself must have been implanted by God, sovereignly, that God sovereignly chose to put faith in the heart of this person, and he chose not to put faith in the heart of that person.

And the reason that you're a Christian today is simply, according to this view, that God decided that you would be a Christian, and decided to give you faith and to call you and to elect you, while at the same time the person who lives next door, he just chose not to give them faith and chose not to elect them or to save them. Now, to those who are not committed to Calvinism, that view sounds a little arbitrary. It sounds almost capricious.

It's almost like God goes, Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. You're in, you're out. You're in, you're out.

I'll take you, you're out. Without any reason. Now, the Calvinists object to that characterization, their view, because they say God didn't do it without reason.

He did it without us meeting conditions, but God always has a reason for what he does. He chose us according to his perfect purpose. Now, he may not have told us what his purpose was, but he always has a purpose.

The fact that he chose this person and didn't choose that one doesn't mean he did it arbitrarily. It doesn't mean he had no reason for it or that he had no purpose in it. We may not know what the purpose was.

We may not know why he would choose this one over this one, but it's not that he had no reasons. His reasons may be in his secret counsel, but he is always reasonable in what he does, and therefore, they don't like to be charged with saying that God is arbitrary in choosing this one or not. That's what Calvinism teaches on election.

Arminianism, which arose in the next generation after Calvin's time, basically holds opposite views from Calvinism. On the matter of total depravity, as to people being totally dead and unable to do anything for themselves, and Calvinists actually believe that you didn't even have the power to respond to God. God put the response in you.

Arminians believe, I don't know if they all believe exactly the same, but Arminianism as I

understand it, and what I believe, is that although we are dead in trespasses and sins before we're converted, that simply means we're spiritually dead, we are unable to bring ourselves into eternal life or to earn in any way our salvation. But it does not mean that a person in that condition is incapable of making moral choices at all. After all, non-Christians make moral choices every day, and some of them make positive moral choices.

There are non-Christians who, when tempted to cheat on their wife, decide that they'll stay faithful to their marriage vows. There are non-Christians who remain faithful to their wives all their lives. That requires them making positive moral choices, although they are dead in trespasses and sins.

The fact that Paul says we're dead in trespasses and sins does not mean that before we're saved, we cannot make a choice about good and evil. It means that we are predisposed by nature to evil, but that doesn't mean we can never make a choice to do a good thing. Just like being a Christian predisposes us to do good, but it doesn't mean we can never do a bad thing.

By nature, we are predisposed towards sin, but even some sinners occasionally make positive decisions toward righteous conduct. And as Christians, with a new nature, we are predisposed toward holiness, but we sometimes make choices to do the wrong thing. You see, you never lose your free will, and even a non-Christian has a free will, and he can choose the right thing.

And according to Arminianism, total depravity does not necessarily mean that we can't make a choice. And a person can make a choice. It means, however, that men are usually inclined to make selfish choices rather than holy choices.

But we still have the power, and sometimes we might even do it out of self-interest, because we are selfish beings, to choose to obey God. And by the way, God sometimes appeals to our selfish interests. Jesus said, you know, it's better to enter into the kingdom, into life with one arm or one eye than to go to hell with both eyes and both hands.

You know, I mean, is that not using scare tactics? I mean, Jesus definitely appeals to our self-interest, probably because before we're saved, we are incapable of doing anything unselfish. But even in our selfishness, we can choose to do the right thing, even if for selfish reasons. And if we become aware that God, you know, is God, he's going to judge the world in righteousness, that we are wrong with God, we're convicted of that, we want to get right with God, whatever our motives, it is possible to choose to become a Christian.

It is possible to respond to God's overtures, to his ruling. And that is why God can get angry at people who don't respond, and he does. If no one could possibly respond in

their own power unless God sovereignly put a response in them, how could God get upset with anyone who didn't respond? They didn't have any power to do otherwise.

And yet the Bible speaks of God's wrath for people who make sinful decisions and who resist his Holy Spirit. It's obvious that we don't have to, or else God wouldn't get angry at us for doing it. Now, therefore, when it comes to the matter of election, or chosenness, the Arminian position is that God has chosen some to be saved based on his foreknowledge of what they would choose.

Now, some Arminians don't even believe in the foreknowledge of God, in the sense that I'm talking about, but classically, Arminians do, and I do, believe that God has absolute foreknowledge. He knew before I was born what I would choose to do. He left me with total freedom to do it, but he had access somehow to the knowledge of what I would do.

And knowing what I would do, knowing, for example, that I would choose to be a Christian, he decided, he chose to include me in his family based on what he knew I would decide. He chose to predestine me to be conformed to the image of his son, which has not yet been completed. That's a work that's in the process now.

But he has predestined that I, because he foreknew that I would choose to follow Jesus, he has predestined that I will eventually be conformed to the image of his son. This is what Paul says in Romans 8, 29. In Romans 8, 29, it says, Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed into the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn of many brethren.

In other words, Paul indicates that being predestinated is not predestinated to be saved, but predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son. And this predestinated purpose applies to those that God foreknew. His advanced knowledge of something about them caused him to make this determined purpose for them, that they would be conformed to the image of his son.

Likewise, in 1 Peter 1, 2, it says that we Christians have been elect, or chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Now, where the Calvinist says, God didn't elect me or choose me based on anything I would do or anything he foresaw me doing. He just did it because he just said, I want you, I don't want you.

I want you, I'll put faith in you, I'll put a response in you, I'll put it in your heart to respond to me. Whereas the Arminian says, that's not exactly how it works. God gives everyone a chance to respond, but he knows in advance who's going to say yes and who's going to say no.

And since he knows what I am freely going to choose, before I choose it, he can already have a plan in place for my life, what he's going to do in my life both before and after I make that choice in time. And by the way, you can all look back, I'm sure, at the time

before you were Christians, unless you're a Christian as long as you can remember, which is the case with some of you, but if you can remember any time before you were a Christian, you can look back and see that God was operating in your life, sovereignly, doing things in your life that led you to Christ. And it's very reasonable, it seems to me, to suggest that that is based on the fact that he knew you were going to become a Christian.

He put together certain relationships and certain circumstances and maybe gave you a certain education or whatever, and affected your life in some way even before you were saved, because he foreknew that this was going to be abused after you got saved. Anyway, these are the two options. The Calvinist with his unconditional election doctrine, and the Arminian with his conditional election, election based on foreknowledge.

Now Calvinists usually like verse 13 here, second to this one is two, because it says, God from the beginning chose you for salvation, through sanctification by the Spirit, and belief in the truth. Now, let me tell you what it sounds like it's saying. It sounds like God has just chosen to save you, and has not chosen others, apparently.

Furthermore, it sounds like he's saying that God chose you to have faith. He chose you to have salvation through sanctification and through faith in the truth. And I know at least one Calvinist quoted this to me as a proof that God is one who himself chooses who's going to have faith and who's not going to have faith.

Now I don't believe the Bible teaches that here or elsewhere. But it is obvious that it could be understood that way. And that is if that agrees with the rest of Scripture on the subject.

The way I understand it is that salvation is a far-reaching term in the Bible. It doesn't just mean getting saved. It doesn't just mean justification.

As we know from Paul's use of the word in Romans, and as it's used in other parts of the Bible, salvation has more than one aspect. The whole salvation package includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. That is, justification, the freedom from the guilt of sin, or the penalty of sin.

Sanctification, which is freedom from the power of sin. And glorification, which is the freedom from the presence of sin. And these are effective in the past, present, and future.

In the past, as far as my past sins are concerned, they're dealt with by justification. I've been declared not guilty of past sins. Sanctification has to do with the ongoing process of making me holy, giving me victory over present power of sin in my life.

That's what sanctification is. And glorification is the eventual glorification of my body when Jesus comes back, the resurrection and the rapture, at which point we will not be

even in the presence of sin anymore. This is the whole salvation package, and there are times in the Scripture, we could take the time if we had it, to show that the word salvation in certain contexts means one or the other of these.

Frequently, we only think of salvation in terms of justification, getting forgiven, getting our ticket to heaven. That's probably the most common way that we think of the word salvation. But what do we do then with Paul saying in Philippians, Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.

You don't work out your justification. Working out your salvation has to do with a different aspect of your salvation, the process of living your warfare out against sin. That's the sanctification part.

Also, Peter says that we're looking for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. Let me just give you this verse, just hear where he's talking about glorification, quite obviously. Verse 5, I think it is.

Yeah. 1 Peter 1 finds us, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. He's not talking about justification there or sanctification, he's talking about glorification, the revelation of our salvation, the glorification aspect in the last time.

Now when Paul deals with salvation in Romans 8, he talks about all of them. He talks about justification, we've been justified by faith, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' justification. Then he talks about the work of the Spirit giving us power over sin, sanctification, then he talks about the redemption of our bodies at the end, when Jesus comes back, the glorification aspect.

Salvation is all of these, and in any given place we have to ask ourselves which one is intended. There is a salvation we already have, there is a salvation we are experiencing now, and there is a salvation we look forward to. When Paul says in 1 Peter 2, 2.13, that God chose you for salvation, what salvation does he mean? Justification? No.

I don't think so, because he says he's chose you for salvation through sanctification. Now that doesn't even mean he's talking about sanctification. The salvation he's talking about is the result of sanctification.

It is through sanctification that we reach this salvation, which must be glorification he has in mind, the ultimate salvation at the end of time. We come into it through the process of sanctification. So he's not looking at justification, or even directly at sanctification, but he's looking at glorification, which is something we come to after a life of going through the process of sanctification.

Salvation here has to do with the final manifestation of our salvation when Jesus returns.

And that has been, of course, what's been on Paul's mind most of the time in Thessalonians anyway. He's talking eschatologically for the most part, so it shouldn't surprise us that the word salvation, here in verse 13, would be an eschatological, or last times aspect of salvation, namely glorification.

If you look back at 1 Thessalonians 5.8, 1 Thessalonians 5.8 says, But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. What aspect of salvation does he mean there? The part we hope for. Hope always looks to the future.

He's talking about the future aspect of our salvation. Look at the next verse, verse 9. For God did not appoint us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Talking about the wrath of God when Jesus returns on sinners, and our eschatological salvation at that same time.

What I'm saying is that Paul has talked about salvation in 1 Thessalonians, in terms of the final manifestation of our glorified bodies. That's the ultimate end of salvation. And in all likelihood, that's what he means in 2 Thessalonians 2, which by the way, stands at the end of an eschatological discussion.

The earlier verses of 2 Thessalonians 2 are about eschatology, so we shouldn't be surprised when he says, God has chosen you to obtain salvation, or for salvation. Meaning ultimate glorification. And this comes about through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our lives.

We are being more glorified as the Spirit sanctifies us. Makes us more like Jesus. And through faith.

It is through the process of walking by faith, living by faith, that we are coming to that end, through continuing in faith. It does not necessarily mean that God has chosen us, has chosen that I, and not this other person, will have faith. And therefore will be saved.

But he's chosen I who have faith. I who he knew would have faith. He's chosen me that through that faith, and the attendant work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I will obtain glorification.

Which is the same thing Paul said in the passage I mentioned earlier, in Romans 8.29. Romans 8.29 says, Whom he did foreknow he predestined what? To be conformed to the image of his Son. That's glorification, to be like Jesus. So what we have been predestined to, or chosen for, is to be made like Jesus.

That choice has been made about those whom God foreknew. God foreknew who would become a Christian, and he foreknew that those who made that choice would eventually be glorified, would become like Jesus, would be conformed to the image of his Son, and so forth. Todd, would you hand it over? Okay, Scott.

You said glorification is to free us from the presence of sin. Is that the indwelling sin in Romans 7? There will be no sin whatsoever in the New Orleans. And we have the indwelling sin until we're glorified? We have, as I understand Romans 7, we do have sin in our members.

We do have a law in our members, which inclines us to sin when we're not walking in the Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit, we can overcome that. If we don't walk in the Spirit, it's always there.

It can always be there to pull you back down again. Just like the law of gravity is always there to pull you down, even though you may temporarily overwhelm it by the use of the laws of aerodynamics. In an airplane, you rise off the ground, you seem to violate the laws of gravity.

But only because there's a higher law, or a better law, a more powerful law, the laws of aerodynamics, seem to counteract the law of gravity for the time being. But as soon as you step outside the airplane in midair, you are no longer taking advantage of the laws of aerodynamics, and you find the law of gravity can pull you down just as fast as ever before, no matter how long you've been on the airplane. No matter how many hours you've been off the ground, saying, hey, I don't think I'm subject to the law of gravity anymore.

I've been hours since I hit the ground. I haven't set foot on Terra Permanis for weeks. This plane just refuels in flight.

I must be totally free from the law of gravity. Well, as long as you are in the airplane, yes. As long as the laws of aerodynamics apply to your case, and you're taking advantage of them, as soon as you step out of that, the law of gravity takes over again.

And as I understand Paul's teaching, sin in my members is always a danger. There's always a threat. But the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death, he says in Romans 8. And that means that as long as I'm walking in the spirit, then there's a higher law, a more powerful law, that governs my life and frees me from the law of sin and death.

But the moment I cease to walk in the spirit, as soon as I cease to take advantage of that greater law, then I find that the law of sin in my members is still there, and just yanks me right down as fast as before I was a Christian even. I never get to the place where there's no sin nature to contend with, as I understand Paul's teaching, until glorification. When I'm glorified, I have a new body, new drives, new nature, everything's new.

And... Zero gravity. Yeah, that's when you reach zero gravity, right? Okay. What I'm saying is that while some would understand 2 Thessalonians 2.13 to be a teaching about unconditional election, I don't see it necessarily that way.

I see the salvation spoken of there as the ultimate end of salvation, which God has chosen to be the destiny of those whom he knew and would believe. And through the sanctification of the spirit and through their belief, he has determined that they'd reach this goal of salvation, not that he'd chosen to get saved as opposed to choosing someone else not to get saved. Okay.

Is it something that you hope for or anticipate for? Hope and faith have a lot of common ground. I mean, they kind of overlap in their application, but the main difference between hope and faith is that hope looks forward to something not yet realized. And Paul says that, I think it's in... Well, it's early in Romans.

I'm trying to think of exactly where he brings this up. He says, if we hope for it, Romans 8.24, for we are saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. So Paul is using the word hope as necessarily being about things that we have to wait for, something that's yet in the future.

Faith is more a conviction about present realities. I believe in God's faithfulness. That doesn't necessarily have to do with the future, except I do expect him to continue to be faithful in the future, too.

I mean, it affects my view of the future, but it's mainly something about now. I believe in God. I believe in the devil.

I believe there are angels. I believe there are demons. This is the unseen realm, and faith is the evidence of the things unseen.

I believe in the goodness of God. Even when my circumstances don't give me reasons to believe God is being good to me, I believe in God's character. I believe that I'm saved by what Jesus did.

I believe in the resurrection of Christ. I believe in his finished work. I believe in the sufficiency of his work for my salvation.

Those are all present realities, and that's what faith essentially is, is trusting in things that I have not seen, but which God has told me to be true, and believing him about them. Now, it can also apply to believing what he said about the future, and that would be faith also. I believe in the second coming of Christ, which is yet future.

That is something I could say I have faith in, but as soon as we start talking about the future, we are also in the realm that we could use the word hope, whereas we don't hope for something that's the present. Faith can be used of either. Faith can be used of things present or things to come.

We could have faith in the veracity of what God said about the present or about the

future, but hope can only apply to the future, and that's all I'm saying. That's the distinction between faith and hope. There's some overlapping.

Everything that is said of hope can be said of faith, but not everything that can be said of faith is necessarily true of hope. Okay, now, so the hope of salvation that Paul speaks of as our helmet, in 1 Thessalonians 5.8, is the hope of our future salvation, the future manifestation of it. Well, let's go on now.

Verse 14, 2 Thessalonians 2.14, For which, that is, this salvation, is that for which he calls you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we've talked about the obtaining of the glory of Christ before. I don't have time to go off on the tangent that I would like to on this, but what I will just say, again, by way of refresher, is that the glory of Jesus is his very likeness in us, his character, which is being reproduced in us.

Remember when Paul said, for our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal and exceeding weight of glory. And he said elsewhere in Romans 8.18 that the troubles of our present time, the suffering of our present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in us. And Paul had earlier prayed for them, and actually made a statement in chapter 1 of this epistle, verse 10.

It says, when Jesus comes in that day to be glorified in his saints, and in verse 12, his prayer is that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him. So, the idea of the glorification, the glory of Christ being manifest in his saints, or in the church, is a Pauline doctrine. And when he says that we have been called to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, he's talking about a glorification, which is another confirmation that verse 13, in using the word salvation, has that particular aspect of salvation in view.

Because he says in verse 13, he chose you for salvation, and verse 14, he called you for the obtaining of the glory. Obviously parallel ideas. It seems obvious to me.

And so our ultimate goal and destiny is to be glorified, that is, made like Christ. Verse 15, therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you are taught, whether by word or by our epistle. Now notice the word traditions is not always a negative thing.

Jesus usually says bad things about traditions, because the traditions he spoke about were the Jewish traditions of the elders. The rabbinic, Talmudic traditions, which had in many cases taken the place of the word of God in the lives of the Jewish people. And had bumped the word of God out of their lives, so that people would keep their traditions by neglecting or disobeying the word of God.

Yet, the word traditions is not necessarily a bad one. There are traditions that are bad, and traditions that are harmful. There are other traditions that are good, and some that

are just plain neutral.

I mean, they're neither good nor bad. The tradition of having stained glass windows in a church is not a bad thing, or a good thing necessarily. Unless, it could be bad, if people begin to think that the only place they can ever meet God is a room that has stained glass windows.

Or if they have pictures of stained glass windows of idols that they bow down to. I mean, obviously, a traditional thing can be neutral or it can be bad, depending on the nature of the case. In this case, Paul speaks positively of certain traditions.

And by traditions, we have to understand that it's just established practices. Paul's own lifestyle set a precedent, which he often told people to follow. His established policies and practices became traditions that he wanted them to hold fast to and to follow.

He mentions traditions in a positive sense again in chapter 3 and verse 6. When he says, We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received of us. And this tradition is obviously Paul's own example of his own conduct. Because he says, For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we did not walk disorderly among you.

And he reminds them of how he behaved. And that's the traditions they received. Paul's own behavior set a precedent.

And what a tradition is, is something that's done because of precedent. Something that's done because it's gained authority by virtue of the fact that it was done by respectable persons before. The reason that many Christians believe a lot of the doctrines they do is not because they find them in Scripture, but because some very reverent Christian leaders believe those things.

Calvinism itself, in my opinion, is not taught in the Bible. But Calvin is highly revered among Protestants. And because he taught his views, very few Protestants really want to go on record as saying Calvin was wrong.

And so there are many teachings that I believe are Calvinistic traditions. And there are a lot of traditions like that. I mean, we've talked before about whether the devil is a fallen angel or not.

And I'm not willing to say he is or is not. But the view that he is, is based on a tradition that goes all the way back to Church Julian, a highly respected church father. And who wants to disagree with him? You know, I mean, we'll just go along with what's been taught by the church all along because it goes back to some notable predecessor.

And some people are satisfied to do that. Now as far as I'm concerned, if Paul is the

predecessor, if Paul is the one who set the pattern, I'm willing to follow it. That's a tradition worth keeping because he was an apostle.

But I'm not necessarily willing to govern my life by traditions of other men in post-apostolic times. Especially if the Bible doesn't seem to support that. But Paul spoke of the way he had behaved and the things he had taught as things that were to form traditions for the church.

I wish more people would follow in the church these traditions. That is the traditions of Paul's behavior. For instance, ministry without pay.

A lot of people don't want to follow those traditions. They want other traditions of men but not the traditions of Paul. Anyway, Paul says, Therefore stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. Notice this note of comfort is always, at least in Thessalonians, associated with eschatology. In chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, he mentioned that he didn't want them to be without hope.

He didn't want them to despair about loved ones who died as those who have no hope. So he talks about the rapture of the church and he closes that discussion in 1 Thessalonians 4.18 with the words, Therefore comfort one another with these words. What words? The words about our hope.

The hope of Jesus coming back. The hope of being taken out of this place and given new bodies and a new order of things later on. Then in 1 Thessalonians 5, he goes on and continues to talk about the second coming of Christ.

He talks about the hope of salvation and so forth. And at the end of that, he says, verse 11, he says, Therefore comfort each other and edify one another just as you are doing. After he talks about the second coming of Christ, he talks about comforting ourselves with the hope of this.

Likewise, this passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 closes with the same words. After he talks about the hope of salvation, the hope of glorification, the hope of the coming of Christ, he says, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. Comfort of hope is on Paul's mind.

He says in verse 16 that God has given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace. This hope of glorification. And that should be a comfort to our hearts, he says.

Now chapter 3. He turns a corner here and moves into a discussion of what had been also a problem in the first epistle. He had only mentioned it once in the first epistle. In

chapter 4 and verse 11, he mentioned that the people should work with their own hands and live a quiet life.

Apparently there was already a problem with that when he wrote that first epistle, but the problem has either intensified or Paul's concern about it has intensified because it hasn't gotten any better. And now he has to use very, very strong language. He says, Finally, brethren, I pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have precourse and be glorified just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for not all have faith.

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. That's a good promise, by the way, if you happen to cherish promises of the Bible. This is a good one.

The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. Jesus, by the way, prayed about this in John 17 when he prayed for the believers. He said, Father, I don't pray that you take them out of the world, but I do pray that you keep them or guard them from the wicked one.

And based on Jesus' intercession for us on that point, Paul is convinced that he can make this promise. God will guard us from the evil one, because Jesus has prayed for us along those lines. And in view of what he's just been talking about in chapter 2, the man of sin, he who comes with deceivableness of Satan, with signs and life wonders, and deceiving people who are not loving the truth, it sounds kind of scary, like, will I be deceived? Will I be a sucker for this? Will I fall away? Will I be part of that apostasy? Well, Paul says to the believers who are sincere, no, don't worry, God will keep you from that.

God will keep you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

Divine guidance is something that most Christians wish they had a better handle on. Real Christians want to obey God, but many real Christians are not sure what God wants them to do. And it is a problem.

I don't know that I've heard people ask questions about anything more than this. How do I know the will of God? How do I know what God wants me to do? How can I be guided by God? Well, Paul gives maybe a clue here. May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

In other words, we're often asking God for specifics, you know, should I get this job? Should I move here? Should I go to this school? Should I go into this ministry or should I do something else? Should I get married? Should I not get married? And really, a lot of times all God's concerned about is that you be directed into the thing that is the most

loving pattern of life and into patience. Now, in other words, God's guidance, his direction is to result in our following certain principles of character. And I think a lot of times God doesn't care which school you go to, although he may, and he may direct you without even knowing you're being directed to do a certain thing.

But you need to concern yourself with being directed into love. Love for God, patience as a character trait. God's guidance, God's direction is likely to be in the direction of just being a more holy person.

That doesn't mean he will not direct you in specific vocational choices, but a lot of times that choice can be made based on the very principles of love or patience or something else. I mean, a lot of times people want a specific word from God about something where really if you just attend to the greater matters, the way or matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness, and ask yourself how does this decision, how would justice or mercy or faithfulness or patience or any of these characteristics that are Christlike, how would they affect this decision? You'll often, many decisions will be made for you in that way. By the way, the word direct here means literally to make straight, make a straight path.

We're familiar with that word, although not the Greek word, but a Hebrew word. In Hebrew, in the Isaiah passage, Isaiah 40, where it says, So voice kind and wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. It refers to removing obstacles from a path.

Make the path straight, make it easy to travel. And when it says that God will direct or make straight the way for your heart to go into the love of God and into patience with Christ, it's in a sense a prayer that God will remove, or it is a prayer that God will remove the obstacles to you following the way of love and patience. God is concerned to help you overcome the hindrances in that area.

So that's implied, I think, in the statement of the Lord, direct your heart. Verse 6, We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly, not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but we worked with labor and toil night and day.

It says that in 1 Thessalonians 2. That we might be a burden to none of you, not because we do not have the authority, that is, the authority to be paid and to forbear working, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this, if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, their busy bodies.

Now those who are such, we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that

they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey our word by this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

But do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now, this is very self-explanatory, I would just make a few observations. In verse 6 he says, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that's a very strong statement. In the name of Jesus was not just a formula that Paul had gone to the end of his prayers, like Christians sometimes now do. In the name of Jesus means acting in the person of Jesus, in the place of Jesus, in his name, in his authority, as his official representative.

To act in a person's name is to do something with their authority as their agent or as their official sent one, as an apostle in this case. What he's saying is, this command I'm giving you is really, you should take it as a command directly from Christ. I'm speaking it as if I were Christ.

I'm speaking it in his authority. Yes? Is Jesus in your office? Pardon? Is he the Father of this grace in your office? Yeah, a similar phrase, at least, in verse 12, where he says, we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now over in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and chapter 5, both places, he uses an interesting expression that I think is equivalent.

Though I'm not sure how the New King James renders it. I know how it is. New King James follows some other new translations in this, but Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2.10, Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive.

For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ. The word presence there in the King James and in some translations is in the person of Christ, or in Christ's stead. He uses the same kind of expression over in chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians, where he talks about acting in Christ's stead.

In verse 20 he says, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, which means in the place of Christ, be reconciled to God. In other words, we are speaking to you as if God himself was speaking to you.

Now he doesn't say in the name of Jesus there, but that's what in the name of Jesus means. Acting in his place, acting in his name, in his stead. And Paul does that from time to time, also here.

In 1 Corinthians 14 he says, if anyone views himself as a prophet or a spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you, they are the commandments of the Lord. Here also, we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is not just a religious phrase that Paul throws in there to fill out the verse.

It is a statement that his command is coming in the authority of Christ. And it means you should take it exactly as if Jesus were writing a letter to you. Now that's important, because a lot of people like to take Paul lightly.

Especially lazy people reading this passage often don't take it too seriously. But you should take it as if Jesus were saying this. What's he saying? He's saying that you should withdraw yourself from any brother who refuses to work.

Now there is a theory among commentators on 2 Thessalonians that in Thessalonica, because the people thought that the day of the Lord had come, or that it was immediate or whatever. They felt like, well why bother to work, we're going to heaven right away anyway, so we'll just kind of quit and wait around. We don't have any proof that that's what was happening.

Some people just put it together that way. It seems to me that there are just some lazy people who like to live off the generosity of the church. In view of the fact that they probably had a lot of feasts which were common feasts for the Christians, and there was probably some sharing of goods with the poor and the needy.

There are some who decide it's easier to just be one of the poor and needy and live off the hospitality of the church, rather than pull his own weight. Now when Paul addressed this question in 1 Thessalonians 4, as I pointed out at that time, it's in the context of brotherly love. In verse 9, 1 Thessalonians 4, 9 says, but let brotherly love continue.

And then he says that you also, verse 11, aspire to lead a quiet life, mind your own business, work with your hands, and have lack of nothing and so forth. It's not loving to let others support you if you are not contributing something worthy of that support. Now Paul did say that people like himself and preachers of the gospel do have the right to expect to be financially supported, because they are making a contribution that's worthy of that support.

They are doing a service, just like any service profession, only more important than any other. And that is a spiritual service, feeding spiritually, and therefore they have the right to expect to be fed physically for their work. After all, they are doing it full time, they can't work full time and preach full time.

Now Paul could because he was single. He could work a full time job, as he said he did, work night and day. Most married ministers don't have that option, they have to have some time with their family.

They can't preach full time and work full time, and Paul, because he was single and had no obligations outside of ministry, he could work, as he says in verse 8, night and day doing this. But he indicates that he set an example they should follow of working hard. Now Jesus of course didn't do that.

Jesus worked for the first 30 years of his life as a secular job, but then he lived off the generosity of others when he traveled around for the latter three years, we're told, of certain rich women who supported him and his disciples. So the main thing here is that there has to be some viable, worthwhile contribution you're making to the Christian community, not just taking from them. The early Christians saw it as a suitable use of time for a person to be spiritually feeding the church, or, on the other hand, to simply be out earning money, which was made available to the kingdom of God and the church.

Both were viable professions, but there were apparently some who were doing nothing worthy of their time, but as it says in verse 11, we hear there are some among you who walk in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now Paul did consider that preachers were working. I heard a story about two little girls, preschoolers who were playing, and one of them, her father, her father was running out to the car to leave, and the little girl said, where's your daddy going? She said, oh, he's going to work.

Doesn't your daddy work? She said, oh no, he's a preacher. Preachers don't work. But preachers do work.

At least they should. And Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17, 1 Timothy 5, 17, Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. So Paul considered it labor to be an elder, to be a pastor, to be a teacher, to be an apostle.

To labor in word and doctrine was a worthy labor. And he said they're to be counted worthy of double honor. There's no question in the context that honor had to do with financial support, in view of the fact that he's just been talking about honoring widows, meaning support widows, who are widows indeed a little earlier in the passage.

Anyway, Paul worked in both senses. Since he had time enough to do it, he worked in a job, ministering, which he would have had a right to be supportive of. In 1 Corinthians 9, the passage I just gave was 1 Timothy 5, 17.

In 1 Corinthians 9, 11 through 15, Paul makes an argument that anyone who preaches the gospel has the right to live on it. That if they minister in spiritual things, they should reap physical things back. And his main point in that passage, 1 Corinthians 9, 11 through 15, is that he has the authority or the right to expect payment for what he does, although he doesn't choose to use that authority.

Others did, but he chose not to. Likewise, here in 2 Thessalonians 3, 9, Paul says, not because we do not have the authority, that is, the reason we didn't take money from you and the reason we weren't supportive of you, is not because we don't have the right to take money, but to make an example of ourselves for you. And I think Christians in ministry ought to make that kind of example more often.

Because there is a general impression, I think, in and out of the body of Christ, that preachers are in it for the money. And perhaps some of them are. I can't be anyone's judge, but I imagine some of them probably are.

But whenever a person is supported by ministry, there's always going to be some cynical people who say, well, he's in it for the money. And the best way a Christian can set an example in ministry, I think, is by not charging for what he does. He may still live off the generosity of the church, but he doesn't require it, he doesn't charge it.

And he should be willing to work if that's what his circumstances require. Because he's not charging for the ministry, if he's not getting the money from some other freewill offerings or something, then he should be willing to go out and work. Paul did that.

So Paul made the decree in verse 10, if anyone does not work, neither let him eat. This goes back to Genesis chapter 3, verses 17 through 19, where the curse was placed on the man, that in the sweat of his brow, and through much labor, he would eat his bread. And of course, men have always tried to get out from under that, and tried to find ways to eat without working, but Paul says, no, we've got to honor that.

We're still under that curse. Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law, but not from the curse of the Garden of Eden. That curse will be in effect until the new heavens and new earth come.

And therefore, we need to honor the fact that our own sinfulness has brought upon our race, this curse of needing to work hard to survive. And anyone who tries to eat without working is trying to avoid his responsibility as a human being, and as a Christian member of the Christian community. And he should not be supported.

He should not be allowed to eat under those conditions. Now, it doesn't mean if he can't work, but it means if he won't work. And the person who refuses to work, Paul says, kick him out.

And he says in verse 6, withdraw yourself from him. In verse 14, he says, if anyone doesn't obey our word by this epistle, note that person. Do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

Yet you don't treat him in an unloving manner. It's like disciplining a child. You don't discipline a child because you don't love them, you discipline a child because you do love them.

You're doing maybe something that crosses their will, and not what they would prefer on the occasion, but you're doing the right thing for their benefit. And what he's saying is there are certain people who live in rebellion and sin, and yet they still want the benefits of Christian fellowship. And there are benefits of Christian fellowship, no question about it.

And they want to keep one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom. And as long as the church tolerates this, and sponsors them, and condones it, and supports them, even though they refuse to behave in a Christian manner, then the church has given them the wrong message. Because these people, as long as they're still holding on to the world, are not saved yet.

These people aren't going to get the false impression, if the church says, okay, you're one of us, even though they're not, they're going to get a false security. The church is much more loving, saying, no, listen, you've got to make a choice, the world or Christ. Sin or holiness, you've got to make a decision.

Are you going to follow Jesus or follow your own flesh? And that's a loving thing to put upon a person. And the only way you can have teeth in and say, okay, if you refuse to do the Christian thing in this case, then you're not going to really be permitted to stay in the Christian fellowship. Because a little leaven, leaven's a lump, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5, where he was talking about sin in the fellowship also, and he told them, put that person out of your church.

To put a person out of the church seems unloving to many modern sentimentalists, and spanking a child seems unloving to the same people. A lot of people have never understood that love doesn't mean give a person everything they prefer. Love means give a person what is best for them.

And a child may never prefer to be spanked, but it may be the best thing for them. And a parent who will not do it, the Bible says, hates his son. It's sentimentality, not love, that causes a person to neglect the discipline of a child.

Likewise, it is sentimentality, not love, that makes a person reject the notion that some church members have to be disciplined in the sense of put out of fellowship, so that their choice is made clear. You cannot have both. You can either be in the church and forsake your sin, or you can have your sin and forsake the church.

You can't have both. And that is what is being advocated here. If you'd like some other scriptures where Paul talks about this issue, Romans, we won't look at them all now, but Romans 16, verses 17 and 18.

Romans 16, verses 17 and 18, Paul tells them to mark and avoid, that would be no fellowship with anyone who is a disorderly, divisive person. First Corinthians 5, verses 4 and 5, and in the same chapter, verses 11 through 13. First Corinthians 5, verses 4 and 5, and in the same chapter, verses 11 through 13.

It talks about the man who is living in sin with his father's wife, and also to put him out. Titus 3, verses 10 and 11, likewise talks about rejecting a person after they've been warned a couple of times of their sin. Rejecting would seem to have the effect of putting

them out.

This present passage, 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 14 and 15. And also, of course, Jesus' own teaching on this subject, in Matthew 18. Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17, where Jesus said, If you won't hear the church, let them be to you like a tax collector or a sinner or a heathen.

Which has to do with churches, but also. Okay, let's just finish up these last few verses. Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way.

The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is assigned in every epistle so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen. I don't believe I need to make any further comments on those verses. So with that we close.