

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

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Date: 13 September 2026

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[0:00] So with that in mind, take your Bibles to 2 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians, we're going to be in chapter 2, And we read the Word of God.

The Word of God says, But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth.

It was for this that He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. Let's pray. Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for Your Word. And we thank You for the opportunity now. Now we have come as Your people to stand before You and say, Speak to us, O Father.

[1:31] Lord, we come with many distractions and many hindrances in our own life. Lord, there are things that are stronger and greater than us, and we ask that You, the strong man, would bind Satan at this very moment, and that You would help us to hear Your voice very clearly.

Lord, may we not only hear it, but may we be willing to respond to it. So, Lord, break in us that which needs to be broken. Mend that which needs mending.

Continue to mold and shape us as You see fit. May we genuinely be in Your hands for Your glory and Your glory alone. And, Lord, as we hear Your Word, we see Your Word, and we take a moment to study Your Word, we pray that the truth of it would captivate our lives.

And, Lord, that it would draw us to a closer walk with You each and every moment. And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Paul is writing to the church at Thessalonica with the reality that he did not spend much time with them.

His time there was cut very short because there was chaos that was stirred up within the city. If you were to go back and read the accounts in the book of Acts, you would see that trouble seemed to follow Paul, and it had a name.

[2:52] It was the legalistic Jewish individuals from city to city that would come behind him quite often, even when he was there, and stir up the multitudes and the crowds. It was a really chaotic scene.

And sometimes the chaos would get so crazy that it would become a distraction. And the Lord would move Paul and move him and those who were with him to another city. For Paul was called of the Lord to be a light unto the Gentiles.

He was a proclaimer of the gospel. He was establishing churches by the Spirit of the Lord and equipping the saints to do the work of the Lord. And he was encouraging them even after he left them.

He would carry the weight and the burden of those churches. It is from that mind that he would say who is able to carry a concern and a burden for all the churches. It was his habit to write back and encourage those churches as they continued to steadfastly stand firm in the midst of the society which he had left them.

Most of those societies were societies with problems and issues that were antagonistic to the gospel that they were believing. Thessalonica was one such city.

[3:59] He is encouraging the church here to stand firm. He is encouraging them to remain faithful. And he is encouraging them throughout this letter to not only to reject false teaching but to stand on the solid ground of their own understanding and their own teaching for the sake of the gospel and

for the glory of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

They were the light set on a hill. They were the salt of the earth. They were the change agent in the midst of the city that was not really wanting to be changed.

And Paul is calling the believers in Thessalonica, much like we are called by the word of God today, to have a firm foundation in a fallen world. How are we to live with a firm foundation in a fallen world?

We do not have to do very much research or really very much questioning to realize that we are indeed in a fallen world.

The early church catechisms would teach such things. And the historical catechisms of Christianity continue to reiterate such things. That the purpose of man is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

[5 : 13] And to love your neighbor as yourself. That's a great commandment. We are to enjoy God. And that is the great purpose of man, to enjoy God and fellowship with him. And the great commandment is to love, to love him and to love others.

But the grand impossibility is that in our fallen nature we cannot do that. There is nothing good within us, nothing indeed. There is nothing within us, and I know it's a hard reality to swallow, that wants to love a holy God naturally.

That is our fallen nature. And that is a grand testimony because, as Henry Blackaby said, Anytime you see somebody being drawn to Jesus or being drawn to the gospel, then you can be certain that that's a work of God taking place right in front of you.

Because no one comes on their own. The old saying is that dead people don't resurrect themselves. A dead man has no ability. He has no right. He has no desires.

The dead man has no longings, no ambition. It is the work of Christ that draws us. And in that, since we cannot love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all of our being naturally, then the second command, loving our neighbor as ourselves, is a double impossibility.

[6 : 33] Does it seem astounding to you that naturally, now I'm not talking about spiritually, I'm not talking about in Christ. I'm talking about before Christ's days. That really, there is nothing within you or within me that loves God and loves my neighbor.

He said, well, pastor, I'm a pretty good person. I was a pretty good person too before Christ, but I was good because it benefited me. And I would love because of what I would get in return.

That's not the love of scripture. The love of scripture is that you would love those who hate you. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And this is love, not that we love those who love us in return, but rather we love our enemies. And this is the reality that we find. But in Christ, praise God, we do not have to live in that natural reality for we have been supernaturally delivered from it.

And we have been given a heart of flesh where a heart of stone used to reside. And in Christ, we can love our God. We can love our neighbor as ourselves. In Christ, we have the opportunity and the possibility to do that.

[7 : 50] But the reality still remains that we live in a fallen world. And so we must stand on a firm foundation in the midst of that fallen world.

And my friend, listen to me. That foundation is not your self. It is not self. We dare not trust in our own abilities or our own efforts.

It is not self. And here, as Paul is coming to the reasoning for this letter, he is laying out the foundation for them and for us as well.

How do we stand upon that foundation? He has just spoken of the condemnation of the false teachers and the man of lawlessness and the end time events. And then he makes this abrupt transition there in verse 13.

And in this verse 13, we come to a glimpse of something. And it is the realization of our salvation event. Notice the realization of the salvation event.

[8 : 53] Your salvation, my salvation. If we can stand and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. The Bible says that he who proclaims Christ has the spirit.

So if we can proclaim in truthfulness that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, then there has been a salvation event. Some dear saints, I know a number of them.

And I know some who say, I cannot remember the exact time of my salvation or the date or even the place. And I just can't put my finger upon it. And some pastors I have known even historically who said, I can never remember the exact place or time of my salvation.

But the question is not, were you saved? And if you were, then when did it take place? The question is, are you saved? And if you are proclaiming Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have to realize there was a salvation event.

There was a moment in time, even if it is unbeknownst to you and you are unaware of it and you cannot recollect it, there was a moment in time in which God called you to himself and he redeemed you, gloriously so, and he changed you from the very depths of your being.

[10:10] Some are progressive events where God is drawing and moving and leading through the consistent teaching of their families or pastors or church life. And they've never known a moment where they didn't know about Christ.

And then there are others who never heard the gospel and they hear the gospel for the first time, the second time, and the third time. And man, the gospel takes a hold of their heart and their mind. And one is just as glorious and just as supernatural as the other. We love to hear the testimony of those who live such wild and extravagant lives.

And in a moment, Christ stopped them in their tracks. It is much like Paul on the road to Damascus. We love to hear those holy encounters. But it is such a glorious encounter of those who never had to be on Damascus Road, those who were raised as Timothy was in the household where they learned the teachings of Scripture from their youth.

And all of a sudden, there was a moment where they were gloriously saved, regardless if they had their testimony or not. But notice something about the salvation events.

[11:15] There are some realizations that we have to grab a hold of. You may not know everything about yourself personally, but there are some things we can realize. Look at what the Word of God says.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord. Now, let's just stop right here. Let's take out the part of the verse that has the commas there.

Now, I'm not really good at grammar, okay? I'm not really good at English, and that's not my strong point. Some of you, you're English majors, and some of you are really good, and so I'm thankful for this. But one thing I do know, that if you're reading a sentence and there's a comma there, then you can still take out the part that is inside the comma, and you still have a complete sentence, right?

I think that's right. I think that's part because that's kind of an interruption to the thought. But you can read it, and you say, Pastor, are you taking things out of Scripture? No, I'm going to read it this way so that you can hear what he's saying, and then we'll interject what he interjected as well.

It's okay if we do that, right? Look at what it says. But we should always give thanks to God for you because... Now, who they are?

[12:20] The beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he's going to tell us something. We should always give thanks for you because... Now, here's the first realization. This is a realization for the believer.

Listen, brothers and sisters in Christ, we should give thanks to God for every other believer in Jesus Christ. Do you know if you do a quick word study of where Paul says he's thankful to God for other believers?

It is mostly confined to the text where those believers were not acting like believers. Here in context of this one, he's about to chastise some of them for they just quit work because Christ is coming soon.

Jesus is coming back. Jesus is coming back. So I'm not going to do anything, right? I'm just going to sit around. And he says if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat. So you got people who are bumming. But what does he say? I give thanks to God for you.

You know one of the most astounding places he says it? 1 Corinthians chapter 1. But I always thank my God for you. The church at Corinth where a man took his father's wife and daddy's still alive.

[13:34] Where women were shaving their head not because it was the latest trend but because they wanted to look like the temple prostitutes. He said, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Yes. Where things were so out of order there was a disruption in the church and he had to calm down. And there was all this wild stuff going on. Where, by the way, people were dropping dead

because they were taking communion in an unholy manner.

The church where Paul said, I've handed such a one over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. But before he said that, I thank my God for you.

See, we like to thank God for those who are doing good and doing right and those who are behaving as they should and those that look just like us. But here's the realization that we come to first.

Listen, brothers and sisters in Christ, it is our responsibility and our prerogative to thank our Holy Father for other believers.

[14 : 41] Regardless, if they look like us, act like us, do as we think they should. Because Paul certainly did not believe that all these believers he thanked God for were doing as they should.

If he did, he would not rebuke and correct them. But before he rebuked and correct them, he expressed his thankfulness for them. We are really quick to say, Brother, you need to change that. Sister, you need to get a hold of that. Let me tell you what's wrong. How quick and sincere are we to say, I thank God for you. I mean, genuinely. I always thank God for you because this is what I have found.

If we begin rejoicing rejoicing with our Heavenly Father for the sake of others' salvation, then we would approach them with truth and love.

Because by this will all people know that you love me by your love for one another. Can I just have full transparency here?

[15 : 44] There are some believers that I, I mean, just because I'm human just like you, okay? So maybe we just, I could stand down there on the floor and you wouldn't think that I'm lifted up.

The only reason I stand up here is because it's easier for you to see me. Okay, that's the only reason. It's not because I'm any kind of lofted position. It's just so that people can see you. It's a little bit easier. We get this picture from the book of Ezra, the first time that a preacher ever stood on a platform because the crowd was there.

That's where we get that. So there's a biblical mandate for it. It's not because there's any exaltation, opposition or anything like that. But let me just have this one thing that I want you to understand. Naturally, my personality doesn't get along with everybody else.

I mean, can I just be really transparent? There are just some people that I'm just like, ah. And that's saying it politely. That's only saying what I can do as a pastor. I'm like, ah.

I don't want to thank God for them. But. But. I thank my God for you.

[16 : 49] Because. You say, how can I do that, pastor? The good news is, is that Paul put this word because here. Paul doesn't say, I thank God for you. Because you're taking care of me.

You're providing for me. You're sustaining me. Not because you're meeting my needs and you're giving to the churches and for the collection of the saints in Jerusalem you gave abundantly above. He doesn't say that. He says, I thank God for you because from the beginning God chose you for salvation.

Here's the realization. Believers, those who know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We thank the Father for the salvation of others because those are the people God chose.

See the difference here? When salvation is about a choice you made. When salvation is a decision you made. When salvation is based upon your works. Then you have the tendency to say, well, my works are better than theirs.

That's why I'm saved. And I see what they're doing and I don't see how they could be saved.

Because look at their life. God would never save that because it is works based salvation and I'm doing much better than them.

[17 : 55] If you don't believe it, look at the historical church and this is what happened, right? Is we begin to look down upon people because works are dependent and works are the things which make me. Therefore I can judge you because you don't look like.

But when salvation is because I'm chosen by the Father and you're as equally chosen as I am, then we're on the same footing. And I have to thank God for you because he chose you.

Not because I like you. Not because I enjoy you. But I love you because God loves you. And he chose you like he chose me.

And when he chose me, he chose the biggest sinner in the room. There's the realization for the believer. Remember, this is why it tells us that we be reconciled to one another.

We bear one another's burdens. We care for one another. We love one another. And don't play that. I know I just said it in a minute. Some people said, Bible says I have to love you. I don't have to like you. Love usually brings a liking with it as well, right?

[18:56] I never would tell my wife, I love you but I don't really like you. That doesn't work. That's not how that happens. Because love, as scripture talks about, is the self-sacrificial giving of myself for you.

And when I begin to love you, then guess what? I learn to like you. That doesn't mean all of our actions are likable.

There are some things about me that I don't like. There are actually more things about me that I don't like than about you. Because I know more about me than I know about you. And there's some very unlikable things in my life, even some very unlovable things in my life.

But God chose me. And sure, I know there's some unlikable, unlovable things in each and every one of your lives because you are man and woman just like me. But God chose you. So I thank God for you.

Because he chose you. Because I'm not worthy and neither are you. So your unworthiness doesn't offend me. Because God chose you. And notice this realization.

[20:05] Now we go from the believer to the self. The individual, not even in his relation to others, understand the realization of your own salvation event.

From the beginning, God chose you. And this is that firm foundation, standing firm in a fallen world. If your foundation are your efforts, or your works, or your labors, or your goodness, or your, any of those things, anything that you can do, in a fallen world, those things are all going to be tested. And in a fallen world, they're all going to crumble underneath you. And in a fallen world, you're always going to mess up. And in a fallen world, you're always going to trip up. And then all of a sudden, you're not going to be standing because the only reason you were there is because you had it all together.

And I can promise you, there will come a moment where you don't have it all together anymore. And the moment you don't have it all together, you're going to just kind of implode because everything holding you up was you.

But when you come to the realization that from the beginning, or the wording could be, you're the first fruits of the salvation. The more literal reading, I think the New American Standard has it right because the word could be from first fruits, but first fruits there, it doesn't seem to fit the context of what Paul is saying here.

[21:17] So first fruits are always implying the beginning. You say, we're getting technical. Yes, it's okay. We can do that for just a moment. But it means from the beginning, you are the first of his choice. You say, well, I'm not the first to be saved. I'm not even the first to be saved in my family.

Neither was the church at Thessalonica. But from the beginning, he chose you before the foundations of the world were laid. And so now all of a sudden, when you're in this fallen world, and you know you didn't choose God, but God chose you for salvation.

He chose you long before you chose him. Your choice of him is really determined upon his choice of you.

And I know we're getting a little, it's making your brain smoke just a little bit, but listen, I promise you that if you stand on the foundation that you thought God was the best choice at that moment, and it was what you decided was gonna work, then when it doesn't work anymore, you're gonna give up. Because in this life, you will have trials and struggles and tribulations, and in this life, you will be persecuted, and you will be hated by all men for my name's sake.

[22:21] And so the moment the world starts hating you, and the moment people start opposing you, if you think you chose Jesus because he's the best situation, listen, he is the eternally best reality, but he's not necessarily the best decision for this life.

Just logically speaking. Because the moment you, quote, choose him is the moment you make yourself susceptible to the attacks of the enemy.

The enemy doesn't care about you until you choose Christ. The enemy doesn't care about you until you're in the Lord's army. And all of a sudden, the fiery darts of Satan begin to be hurled at you because you chose someone who was better than him, so he thought.

And then Jesus says that you have to turn the other cheek. You have to love your enemy. You have to pray for those who persecute you. All these things that don't really appeal to the flesh, so Jesus

isn't the better option in this life.

I know that seems kind of anti-gospel, anti-good news, but the gospel is not about the temporary existence of what we call life. The good news is that there is an eternal salvation found in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and that God is in the beginning to be redeemed in our Lord and to be renewed in our fellowship with him.

[23 : 34] And that fellowship with him gives us a peace that passes understanding in the midst of all those things. And as Paul would say in Romans chapter 8, in all these things, we overwhelmingly conquer all the trials and struggles and all this darkness and spiritual forces.

In all those things, we have the presence that delivers us because God chose us. He said, well, Pastor, I remember a moment in my life where my mind was just convinced that Jesus was it, and so I cried out to him in prayer, and I said, Lord, I choose you, and that is legitimate.

But in the beginning, it was because he chose you first. Let's go back to what I said at the very beginning because some people hear this and they say, well, how do I know if I'm chosen? Well, do you have any desire and inclination whatsoever to the Lord God Almighty?

He said, well, yes. If I didn't have that, I wouldn't be here. No man desires the things of God lest he be drawn. The very presence of the desire in your own life is the testimony to the activity of God in your heart.

And here's the realization. You are the beloved brethren. Because God chose you. And your salvation happens in this way.

[25 : 01] By the way, I love what he, descendants doesn't end there. Through the sanctification of the Spirit, we don't sanctify ourselves. We don't set ourselves apart for holy service.

That's what sanctification means, to be set apart for holy service. We don't sanctify ourselves. We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. And we have faith.

You say, well, I'm saved by faith. Right, but faith is not blind faith. Look at what it says. We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and faith in the truth. This is how salvation comes.

The Spirit sets you apart for holy service. And he imparts to you faith in the truth. You believe the truth. I am the way, light, and the truth.

No one comes to the Father but through me. When we say we need to have faith to be saved, it doesn't mean, I mean, you can have faith in any number of things, right?

[26 : 02] You can have faith in a lot of things. You can put your faith in any number of things in this world. It is that you need to quantify or qualify that faith. That faith needs to be in the truth.

Not just faith, but faith in the truth. The truth of the gospel. And there's the salvation event. Look at the realization. See the realization of the salvation event.

But it doesn't end there. Because Paul continues on and he shows us the manifestation of salvation's end. We're trying to stand firm in a fallen world and we are presently saved in Christ. And he's called us in a moment in time in history. In the beginning, God chose us, those that know him as our Lord and Savior. But yet we're living in the present. And the present is a fallen world. And it's so easy to get caught up in the fallen world that we forget about there is an end time, right? So salvation exists in three parts. You were saved, you are being saved and you're going to be saved.

[27 : 08] There is the past event, there's a present reality, and then there's a future certainty, right? So all these things happen. And what Paul says to ensure that we stand firm, notice the manifestation is going to happen at the end.

Paul always has the end of salvation in view. Always. Always. And he shows it to us here. And he tells us, I love it.

Don't you love it when the scripture is just really clear? You say, God, I wish you would just tell me why. I love this. It is for this he called you. It is for, the little reading is, it is for this reason that he called you through our gospel.

If he chose me and he called me, why did he do it? You ever ask that? God, why did you save me? Well, if you're convinced that you chose him and you made the decision and you did enough good works and you don't ask that question but if you come to the realization that you're saved because he chose you and then we're forced at times, but God, why did you choose me?

Why me? I believe Paul asked that later on the more he walked with Christ and the more he wrote. It was for this that he called you through our gospel.

[28:25] This is why. That you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's the manifestation of salvation's end. That you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know what the end of our salvation is? Is that we will be the partakers of Christ's glory. We will be glorified with him and in him.

So that means in the present fallen world when it seems that you're doing nothing but living in humility and in brokenness and in despair, know this, that the end of salvation, it ends with your glorification.

But it's not your glory. So you don't have to labor to find it. You don't have to succeed in this world to attain it. You don't have to outwork anybody else so that you can get any glory.

It is the glory of Jesus that we become the partakers of. Read the book of Revelations. He who overcomes, I grant that he would sit with me on my throne. And Jesus, read the rest of it, he's sitting on his father's throne.

[29:36] That's that glorious throne in which there was all these colors and cherubim and fiery darts and go read the book of Ezekiel and you see everything is falling down and going holy, holy, holy. It is not your glory. It's not my glory.

It's not anything that we earned. It's not my throne. It's not your throne. It's nothing we've done. It's his. But the end of salvation, is that we would be the partakers of his glory.

When Moses came down off Mount Sinai and his face was radiating, that was no glory of Moses because it was never there until he went and met with the Lord, right? That was the glory, the Shekinah glory radiating off him.

But in this fallen world, that was temporal in nature. So he would veil his face so that they would not see the glory departing. When the glory departed, they wrote Ichabod across it. Remember that? And in Jesus, when he walked out of the temple the last time, he says, the glory has departed from the temple.

And then he walked out. It's one of the most telling statements in all of scripture, by the way. If you want to know where the glory is, is that when Jesus is in the temple, he says, the glory has departed and then he leaves. He's literally saying, when I leave, the glory leaves.

[30:38] Why? Because if Christ is not here, there is no glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus does not radiate or does not reflect glory.

He radiates glory. It is not a reflection upon him. It is a radiation from him. And so when we are drawn to his presence, salvation ends with us in his presence.

Then when we are in his presence, his glory is radiating on us. The end result of salvation is that we become the partakers of his glory. And there's no boasting there because none of us bring anything to it.

we're not going to make him more glorious. We're not going to make him more magnificent. We become the reflectors of his glory. And if that is the end, then it also ought to be the ambition today.

[31:41] So if the end desire of salvation is that Christ is glorified in me and in you and in his work and our salvation and our redemption and we are the partakers of his glory, then our reason and our foundation for existing today ought to be that he is glorified.

That he is magnified. And it becomes more about his glory than our comfort, than our ease and than our, even our existence.

How do we do that? And we'll wrap up really quick. Because there's the realization of the salvation event, the manifestation of salvation's end. My friend, what is so desperately needed to stand firm in this fallen world is the continuation of salvation's effect.

He says, so then, brethren, so then, because these things are true, God chose you from the beginning and in the end you're going to get to be the partaker of Christ's glory, so then, here's something you need to do.

Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. Now, we don't want to hold to traditions that aren't right, but we're talking about traditions that are good and wholesome because some traditions are.

[33:05] And what is Paul saying here? He said, so then, brothers. Jesus said it this way, remember your first love. Remember your first love.

Quick question. Do you remember that feeling of when you realized you were genuinely, truly forgiven?

that Christ had restored you to the relationship with the Holy God? That the love of God overwhelmed you?

Do you remember that reality that He really wants me? and how in that moment of freshness and new birth, you say, wow, I'll do anything for Him.

Second question. Have you ever gotten over that? Did that feeling become so normal that you may say, I'll do anything for you, but now you say, Lord, I'll do anything.

[34 : 18] You want me to and then fill your calendar so full of everything else that He has no room to work? Did you ever get over that? This I hold against you, that you have left your first love.

Don't ever get over your salvation. Don't ever get over the glory of it. Don't let the world steal that away with its cares and concerns and joys and pleasures.

Don't let the enemy distract you, distort you, or twist you. Therefore, hold fast.

Hold on to it. Fan the flames. You know what I'm saying in churches, too often we take new believers that are on fire for the Lord and we quench the fire with the suppression of the church.

The church is like, calm down there, brother. Calm down there. Don't get too crazy now. You get a little carried away. Don't do that. Keep stoking the flames. How do you do it? Then fall in love with Jesus every day. How did He draw you through the Word and get into the Word?

[35 : 32] How did He draw you through prayer? Have conversations with Him. Fall in love with Him every single day. Hold fast to that which you used to do. If it doesn't need to be done, cast it aside.

Don't let go. You say, well, how can I do it? Well, the answer is found in verse 16 and 17. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father. And here's this reaffirmation.

By the way, He is our Lord and our Father. How do we know it? Because He has loved us. And that love does what? It is giving us comfort and good hope.

You know what the love of the Father does? It gives you comfort and good hope in a fallen world. This world is not comfortable, but there's comfort and good hope by grace.

You see that? Underline that. By grace. Not by works. Not by efforts. Not by just... By grace.

Comfort and good hope by grace. May He comfort and strengthen your heart in every good work and word.

[36 : 45] May that first love affect our words and may it affect our work for the glory of Christ until we stand in the manifestation of that glory for all of eternity.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the challenges that it brings us. We thank You for the admonition of it.

Father, we pray that we would become the people of Your Word. May You be glorified through our application of its truth. And we ask it in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.