



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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### **Clinging to the truth?**

**2 Thessalonians 2:13-17**

**~ Brent Russell ~**

- **I am sure most of you have TV's**
- VCR's?
- Have you ever taped a movie because you where going to go out
- And then a week later you sit down to watch it and you are thoroughly enjoying it when ten minutes from the end **the tape ends...**
- It makes one almost want to smash the TV
  
- **At some level much of the thinking that is happening in the church is a little like a tape that is too short**
- **And it misses out some of the choice bits of information that are of great significance to our lives as Christian believers**
  
- **Modern theology** has changed our thinking about a lot of things
- **Some of it good; some of it bad**
- There has been in the last 50 years an increased focus on the work of the Holy Spirit
- Mission work is again finding it's rightful place
  
- **We may worship in a relatively conservative mainline church**
- But if we begin to look at how we think about God and about life
- **We will find that we have a fairly liberal and modern understanding about God that is not always in tune with scriptural evidence**
- Our understanding of God is often tainted by theology that is outside the scope of scripture
- **Thinking about God that is not what we would always call orthodox**
- **And whilst there are things that we may learn from some of these theologies there are aspects of our theological understanding that are then missing like the punch line to a great joke**

## Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

- The reading out of Thessalonians outlines for us three things that are important if we are to journey on a path of truth that will lead us to a fuller understanding of our faith
- If we want to survive as Christians in 2004 there are three aspects of our faith that are outlined for us here by Paul that are of great importance each of us
- Aspects of theology that are different to some of the current trends in the wider church

### FIRSTLY: WRT FAITH - WE MUST NEVER FORGET WE ARE ONLY PART OF THE WHOLE

- One of the issues that I and many others have with some of the modern thinking about God is that it is overly **individualistic in terms of how we interact with Him**
- Paul writes to this church telling them that they must always give thanks for the brothers
- **1 John 3 states that we will know that we have passed from death to life if we love the brothers**
- **If you are like me you find it easy prayer to say thank you for things**
- **For food, house, car, clothes**
- **But it is people that are the things we must be most thankful for**
- And in particular the brothers and sisters of our faith that sit next to us at worship each Sunday
- **The people sitting next to you right now are the most valuable things in the world**
- **Modern thinking has made us extremely individualistic about our faith it has made it something personal and even at times something private**
- **And our faith should not and must not ever be either of these things**
- The fullness of our understanding of Jesus message ONLY takes place within the context of a **community of faith**
- Some of the very basics of what we do as a church can ONLY be understood in the context of a community
- **Baptism, Communion, Worship, Fellowship can ONLY be understood in the context of US**
- **The Bible is quite clear that you cannot take things with you to heaven**
- **When you die all your toys are left behind**
- **"He who dies with the most toys still dies"**

- **In revelation the Bible tells us that the streets are paved with Gold**
- **There was a very, very wealthy man who died and finally finds himself at the gates of heaven**
- He is clothed in white, his Rolex is gone, his expensive clothes are gone and his fancy Gucci shoes are gone
- So he asks St Peter if he can go back and bring some things with him
- So finally St Peter relents and says all he can bring is a briefcase
- The man arrives with a heavy briefcase
- St Peter says we have to check because of terrorist threats
- And when he opens it there where 5 large gold bars
- And St Peter says pavement you want to bring pavement?
  
- **The only things that we will have in heaven that we had on earth will be each other**
- **YOU are the only things of any real eternal value**
- **Human beings are the only things that have any real value and we need to cherish this community of faith if we are to understand the fullness of our relationship to God**
  
- It is very hard to have any real faith outside of the church
- Many may claim that they do but in reality they don't;
  
- **Modern thinking has made our faith too individualistic, too personal**
- **Far to much of ME, I, MINE instead of US, WE, OURS**
- **Faith is a WE and OUR thing**
  
- If we only understand the response of faith from our personal point of view without the understanding of the community of brothers and sisters around us we are so much the poorer for it
- It is only in the family of God that our faith finds it's fullest expression

**SECONDLY: WRT SALVATION - WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD**

- **The second line of thinking that we are deeply affected by is that we have the ability to choose or reject God**
  - **In the same way with regards to community of faith we have in places allowed our thinking to be too individualistic – we have missed on the crux of the story**
  - **So too have we have allowed our thinking with regards to our salvation to be far to much based on OUR choosing of God**
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- This is a heavy topic that needs to be treated with care so I will try to be gentle
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- **Many things in life are somewhat paradoxical**
  - Pain produces character
  - Suffering produces perseverance
  - That sometimes only through pain can there be healing
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- **And many theological ideas are somewhat paradoxical simply because we don't understand the fullness of God**
  - We don't see the **bigger picture**
  - Because of the truth that we **cannot fully comprehend God**
  - Like a child who gets somewhat confused with the facts of a story because he cannot grasp it's whole
  - So we too get somewhat confused at times because we are limited by our humanity
  - Our minds are for now trapped inside this human body with it's intellectual limitations
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- And one of the apparent paradoxes is that whilst we do at some level choose God
  - **It is also clear both from scripture and experiential evidence that God chooses us**
  - **The theological word for this is predestination**
  - That God Pre- destined our future in Jesus
  - **2 Thessalonians 2 vs 13 God chose you**
  - **2 Thessalonians 2 vs 14 He called you**
  - It is God who calls and chooses us and all we can do is respond

- **Let me illustrate the paradox with a story**
- The story is told of a group of theologians who were discussing the tension between predestination and free will. Things became so heated that the group broke up into two opposing factions. But one man, not knowing which to join, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he joined the predestination group. "Who sent you here?" they asked. "No one sent me," he replied. "I came of my own free will." "Free will!" they exclaimed. "You can't join us! You belong with the other group!" So he followed their orders and went to the other clique. There someone asked, "When did you decide to join us?" The young man replied, "Well, I didn't really decide--I was sent here." "Sent here!" they shouted. "You can't join us unless you have decided by your own free will!"
  
- **Modern thinking, tying in with our sense of individuality has also led us to a place where we choose God**
- **Not once in the NT is the word CHOOSE ever used for a Human response to God**
- **It is only ever used God as He interacts with us**
- **It is always God who does the choosing**
- **No-one in the NT is ever said to have chosen God only that God has chosen them**
  
- Clearly there is some response expected when God calls us
- But the truth of the Scriptures is this - It is God who chooses us not us who choose Him
- **We can only chose to respond to him and to his call**
- But his choosing of us is the foundation of our faith
  
- **You see when you forget this truth you become the controller of the relationship you have with God**
- **God's activity in your life is then under your control not His**
- **That your free will can in fact override the will of almighty God**
  
- So when you feel distant from God then God is distant...but we know this is not true
- God gently, yet firmly always leads us back to himself
- Because the relationship of love between him and us was by His instigation
- **Our love is too idiosyncratic, to particular and too conditional**
- **Whilst God loves perfectly and unconditionally**
  
- **Whilst we where yet sinners God loved us! The scriptures tell**

**THIRDLY: WRT TO TEACHING - WE MUST STAND FIRM – NEW IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER**

- **There is an idea that certainly has been used to good effect by advertisers and that is that new is always better than old**
  - And sadly for most things this is just not true
  - Cars – shorter lifespan and they have too much plastic
  - Music – oldies are still fashionable even amongst young folk
  - Furniture – modern stuff made of chipboard not real wood
  - Houses – just not built like they used to be
  - Red wine – needs to be matured
  - People – old people have more info and experience than young people
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- **Modern society has tried to condition people to believe that old is bad and new is good**
  - **We see old people written off**
  - **Things that are perfectly functional must be replaced with the new improved version**
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- We seem to believe that just because something is new it is better than the old
  - This modern thought paradigm has infected the church too
  - That somehow new teachings will affect your life like nothing else ever did
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- **All over the life of the church there are those who run around from one event to the next or from one new teaching to the next**
  - **Finding the next book**
  - **The next tape or CD**
  - **The next teaching**
  - **The belief that somehow this new idea will bring revival to their stunted and dying spirituality like nothing before ever did**
  - **The Bible warns us clearly in Ephesians 4:14 that if we are tossed around by every new wind of teaching we are like infants**
  - **Like a boat without a rudder we will wander and never reach the destination planned for**

- Whilst we should clearly not die in our traditions, stagnant and unchanging
  - There are God given basics that never ever change
  - They have been instituted since the beginning
  - And they will be there till the end
- **The message to the church then 2000 years ago is the same as it is for us now**
- Do you folks have a favorite movie that you watch over and over again?
  - Something you never get tired of?
  - **For the ladies 'Gone with the wind' or 'Casablanca' or 'Pretty woman'?**
  - **For the men "Star wars"**
  - **I always get a tear in my eye as Darth Vader dies!**
- There are things that are comfortable with familiarity and with age
  - Like an **old jersey** that has holes and stains but fits so well
  - Or an **old leather recliner** that is faded and squeaks but is molded to your bum
  - **Some things are far better aged and matured and familiar**
  - **And when we are familiar with them they hold great comfort for us**
- **What I am suggesting is that when it comes to being saved God has chosen the message of good news about Jesus as the means for salvation**
  - **Vs 14 'He called you to this through the Gospel'**
- **"Jesus died so that sinners could have eternal life"**
  - **It is a message that we know well**
  - That is **comfortable it brings us comfort** and hope that **fits us so perfectly**
  - Like our favorite movie where we can say the characters final words, the Gospel is something that is so close to our hearts that it is **ingrained** in us
- **Jeremiah the prophet tells us "In that day I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts"**

- **Stand firm in the teaching passed on to you Paul writes**
- Whether it is sermons, scripture or experience stand firm in what you have been taught
- **The message of Jesus has not changed in 2000 years**
- **It is never going to change**

#### CONCLUSION

- The message to the church from this passage is this
- **Understand that your faith has little meaning outside of this community**
- Christianity is something WE do and experience TOGETHER
- **Understand that your salvation is not in your hands – rather in God's**
- You can respond to God, but it is He who has chosen and called you according to his will
- **These are OLD truths understood by the first Christians and they have not, and will not ever change**
- **Understand that the truth of the Gospel is simple,**
- **It is eternal**
- **It is unchangeable**
- It is through the Gospel that God saved the first believers
- And it is through the same old Gospel that you were saved
- And it will be through the same OLD gospel that our grandchildren will be saved
- **It is the OLD, OLD story of Jesus and his love**
- **And it will never ever grow old or worn out and it will never change**