

## Chosen for Mission

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Our passage is loaded with dense rich words. Some are clickable; press on them and they take you places which expand and enhance their meaning. Let's take a look at: Chosen as Firstfruits, Stand Firm in Tradition, Eternal Comfort.

### Saved to Mission

The idea that God would choose some people for salvation, and not others, can be seem arbitrary. Like the old poem recited while plucking petals from a flower, "He loves me; he loves me not. He loves me; he loves me not." But this way of seeing election is shaped more by individualism than Scripture. Election is much bigger than how a soul is saved; *it's how the whole world is renewed*. How's that? In our passage (and much of the NT), we enter the middle of a story. If you click on election, it actually takes further back in the story, to a time when God *chose* Abraham to be the Father of Israel. He was chosen, not just to get a one-on-one relationship with God, but to father a nation which would carry a divine blessing to *all the nations*. Israel was to be a "light to the nations," a nucleus of God's renewing work in the world. In a word, a *firstfruit*: [Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest](#) (Je 2:3). A firstfruit was a tithe, a dedication to God's purposes and glory. Israel was chosen, as a firstfruit, of a greater harvest. As it turns out, there's not just one but three firstfruits in the story. The first, Israel, compromises their status by welcoming other gods into the crop. So God chooses a second *firstfruit*. Jesus comes, not to bear the light but to be *the Light* to the nations, dedicating his life, death, and resurrection to secure God's mission to the world. Jesus became the firstfruits of the resurrection, [But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep](#) (1 Co 15:20). Jesus resurrection became a picture of the future, of why God chose Israel—to renew fallen humanity and all creation. Through Jesus, God elects and reshapes Israel into the Church to carry the gospel light to all peoples. The Church is the third *firstfruit*, an expanding nuclear center from which God transforms the world, [God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved](#) (13). So when we enter the story here, we step into God's election of a *community*, not just individuals. His election isn't an arbitrary attempt to abstract souls from the world to God; rather, election is the commissioning of a community to take God to the world. So election

is communal but not just social; it's cosmic. It's about the firstfruits spreading, through repentance and faith in Jesus, until whole bodies, cities, worlds are renewed. In a phrase it's, [obtaining the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ](#) (14). Election has a trajectory; we are chosen for mission. God's saving grace does not terminate on you; it reconciles you to God to be a reconciling community for the world. His choice is not static or abstract; it is the love of God super abounding in Christ to form a new humanity through which fallen people and all creation can be reconciled and renewed. If you're a follower of Jesus, you have to ask yourself at this point, Am I living as a firstfruit of God's renewed humanity and world? Does my life reflect my election, dedication to the mission of God? Am I sharing this story with others, inviting them into what God is doing in history? If not, why? Not smart enough, not good with words? None of these were requirements for the Thessalonians. I was talking with my British uncle who has Parkinson's. For years he taught in the Univ of Manchester, so he's no dummy. But now his speech is slurred, his hands curve in rigidly, and he has walk slowly. He was telling me he struggles to share his faith, but that he is confident about his future in Christ. I stopped him in his tracks and said, Jan, that is amazing. Someone with your challenges, your condition, to say you are confident about your future—most people would love to have that confidence. Instead of trying to talk people into your beliefs, just show them your belief. Tell them that, despite your condition, you have comfort and confidence in Jesus and what he has done for you. We all have a story to tell, limitations and struggles, in which Christ is our greatest comfort. Tell people. Let them in on the eternal comfort of Christ and get on with your election—inviting people into the true story of the world! You are chosen for mission. You don't have to talk anyone into it. Verse 13 reminds us that's the work of the Spirit to sanctify people and grant belief in the truth. We just get on with our calling, telling others the good and true story, how Jesus is changing us.

### **Stand Firm**

How, then, do we sustain this calling when it's hard? [So then brothers stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us](#) (15). How, you make a choice to stand firm and hold fast. Both are imperatives. In fact, the way we stand firm in the faith is by holding fast. Holding firmly to what? The traditions. This is a special word that means "to hand down or receive." It shows up just a few verses later, "[the tradition that you received](#)" (3:6). Paul

uses to refer to traditions established by apostles. Not like the tradition of putting your Christmas tree up after Thanksgiving. That can come and go, but these divinely handed down. What are they? Well, he could be referring to all the apostles teaching, but there are three places this word shows up in his teaching. First, *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received...* (1 Co 15:1). The first tradition is the ***Gospel***. If we do not stand firm in what Christ has done for us, and what he is doing in the world, we become deceived and fall away. We will gradually embrace lesser gods that lead us away from the one, true God. This week someone walked into my office to share his friend is struggling with doubt. We shouldn't condemn doubt outright. City Life welcomes doubters, skeptics. Ask your questions, but be humble enough to welcome answers. Don't reduce your identity to what you're against—cynic—but build it on what you are for—the truth. Don't doubt for doubt; doubt for truth. The gospel is big enough for your doubts and will help you stand firm. Remember, the gospel is the true story of the world, but we must hold fast to it to enjoy a glorious future. If my uncle who's speech is slurred, and whose body doesn't work right, can cling to Christ, so can you. Stand firm in the gospel. Second tradition is ***Communion***. *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread...* (1 Co 11:23–24). Communion is a tradition that reminds us, not only of the gospel but also of community. It is a meal taken *together*, a collective reenactment of what it cost to make us firstfruits. The body and blood, the bread and the wine, remind us each person is deserving of forgiveness because Jesus undeservingly took our sentence. In that passage, the Corinthians weren't waiting to observe the meal together, and some were getting drunk. They were leaning on individual desire, controlled by lesser gods. Not acting as a firstfruits community. That's why it says we must examine ourselves, so we don't eat and drink in an unworthy manner. Communion reminds us that all of us, each one, deserve forgiveness because of the body and blood of Christ. On what other basis should we forgive? Why not hold a grudge? Because Christ bore the holy grudge of God against you. Then let forgiveness flow like wine. Communion helps us hold fast to the gospel *in community*. The third tradition is ***gathering*** together, *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together* (Heb 10:25).



## Eternal Comfort

And just in case this sounds too difficult, too daunting, we're given every possible grace to stand firm and hold fast, *Now may the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God the Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word*" (16-17). This is a benediction, a blessing to send them on their way in taking Jesus' good news into the world. Every Sunday we gather around the gospel, take communion, and close with a benediction for the same reason. It isn't just a sprinkling of meaningless words; it's a reminder we have everything we need to carry on in God's mission, being a firstfruit of his eternal harvest. How's that? The Lord Jesus himself *and* God the Father's love poured out on you. Reminds me of how Paul sees the Church, how I want to consistently see the Church but don't: *beloved by the Lord* (1). Now it's not as though Paul doesn't see their faults: their alarm, anxiety, impurity. It's just that he chooses to see them, first, the way God sees them, *beloved*. The way we should see one another. Beloved is in a tense that means loved once and continually loved, over and over. In all our mess, struggle, doubt, God loves us over and over. *That* is comforting. And if that's true, then we can "risk" the love of others to tell them of the eternal love of God! Where they can find an eternal supply of comfort with the Father and the Son. Comfort, not so we can kick back but *for every good work and word*. It's hope for the world; chosen for mission, election as firstfruits of a super-abounding, reconciling love. It's love for us, yes, *but not only for us*, for friends, neighbors, co-workers, Thanksgiving family, Austin, Dublin, Montreal, the world! We're chosen for mission, a firstfruit of God's renewing work in the world. Let's embrace our call to be an expanding nucleus of eternal comfort and grace for a broken and hurting world.