

Series: 1 Thessalonians

Title: Knowing Your Election

Text: 1 Thessalonians 1: 4-10

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The church at Thessalonica was very young at the point Paul wrote this letter. Immediately, upon God calling them through Paul's preaching, they began suffering affliction and persecution. So Paul writes to encourage them to continue in the faith and patiently endure. The word the Spirit used to comfort and encourage them is this:

1 Thessalonians 1: 4: Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

The doctrine of election is only offensive to the unregenerate, carnally religious man. Why? It declares salvation began with God rather than man. God chose his Son and anointed him Messiah, to be the Righteousness by which his people are redeemed and justified and sanctified and saved. God chose his people in Christ before the foundation of the world.

The doctrine of election offends men because it declares all men are sinners. It declares that had God not chosen a people and caused us to approach him, not one sinner would have.

Romans 3:11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Psalm 65:4: Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

The doctrine of election is offensive because it declares God did not choose his people because of any foreseen merit in us. God chose WHOM HE WOULD.

Romans 9: 11: (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12: It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13: As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. 14: What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15: For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16: So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

But in the heart of those the Spirit of God calls, the doctrine of election is good news. It is not only assurance to us personally, but also the assurance that as we send the gospel forth, Christ shall call out those he chose to save and they shall remain in faith. That is what he declared to his apostles:

John 15: 16: Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

The Lord told Ezekiel preach to these dry bones and ask the Lord to come and breathe upon them that they might live. James said,

James 1: 18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

But it is not merely the doctrine of election we want to see sinners believe; we want to see them believe on Christ Jesus the Son of God. It is Christ alone who saves his people; it is Christ we must believe on. When the Lord Jesus came to the blind man after they cast him out, he did not say, "Do you believe the doctrine of election?" He said, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" When the jailor cried to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They did not say, "Believe the doctrine of election." They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (same goes for those in) thy house."

Proposition: It is by believing on the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we know our election of God.

The Thessalonians believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. They united with his people, sent forth the gospel, and served one another. No amount of persecution and affliction could turn them from Christ nor from the gospel nor from their brethren nor from sending the gospel forth. So Paul wrote to encourage them, saying, "*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*"

WE KNOW BY THE MESSAGE AND ITS EFFECT

1 Thessalonians 1: 5: For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

We know our election of God by the message we first heard and how we were made to receive it.

God sends the gospel to those he elected to save—"our gospel came...unto you..." It was not a false gospel that came to them but the one true gospel. There is but one gospel. There is another that men preach but it is not the true gospel. Paul spoke of "another gospel which is not another" (Gal 1:6); "Another jesus" which is not another; "Another spirit"—doctrine—which is not another (2 Cor 11: 3-4).

But there is only one true gospel, one true doctrine, the doctrine of the one true, successful Lord Jesus Christ. I have heard men who claim to believe the true gospel say, "I could no longer sit under the preaching I heard when God first saved me." They mean that since then they have "come to the doctrines of grace" (as they say) and now they think the gospel they were sitting under was false. But God does not save under a false gospel then bring sinners to the true gospel. We never find such a thing in the scripture.

In scripture, God calls through the truth of the gospel and believers hold fast that same good news unto the end. It is the message of our glorious Redeemer, who is all our salvation. It was not men but God who sent Paul to the Thessalonians. The Spirit of God forbid Paul to go another place and sent him to Macedonia to the city of Philippi then to the city of Thessalonica. Why? The Lord had elect there who he had redeemed by his precious blood. The Lord Jesus will see to it that those he redeemed hear the good news. They must!

So what did Paul preach to these Thessalonians?

Acts 17: 3: Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

We know what Paul preached in that outline by what he wrote in all his epistles. Christ must needs suffer because God the Father chose him to be the Christ before the world was made and entrusted his elect to our Savior. God sent his Son to manifest his righteousness by fulfilling the law and justifying his people. The Father sent his Son to establish the covenant of grace. God the Father sent Christ to be Head and High Priest over his church to fill us with the Spirit and gather us as one body in faith. That is why Christ must needs suffer.

Paul declared that Christ was victorious. He conquered death, fulfilling the law and putting away the sin of his people. How do we know Paul preached that? He said Christ rose again from the dead. Paul declared "this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is the Christ." He is the Son of God, anointed of God to be the Christ, the salvation of his people. And Christ is Salvation to them he calls.

Many believed. How? By the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul said in our text, "*our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance.*" The gospel *did* come in word; it must; Christ must send the gospel to those he redeemed. Yet, the gospel did not come to them in *word only*. It did not fall on deaf ears. Nor did it produce in them a cold, formal profession and performance of grace. It came *in power*. The Spirit of God created spiritual life in them and made them a new creation. He gifted them with faith in Christ and love for Christ. God gave them much assurance that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God and they cast all their eternal care into Christ's hand. The Spirit did in them what Christ said he would do in his elect all over the world.

John 16: 8: And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9: Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10: Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11: Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

They could say as Peter,

John 6: 68:...Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. 69: And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Paul says this was certainly of the Spirit of God and not of him or Silas, "*as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*" It was not by Paul or Silas that these Thessalonians were persuaded to believe on Christ. There was nothing in Paul or Silas to make these sinners give them a hearing, much less believe on Christ. Paul and Silas had just been rejected of men, beaten, imprisoned at Philippi before coming there. They were still barely able to stand up. It was well-respected Jews that had rejected them. The officers of the law had thrown them in prison at Philippi and respected Jewish leaders rejected them at Thessalonica.

Not only that, when Paul preached he did not use flattering words. He declared them ungodly sinners with no righteousness before God and no way of producing one. Paul preached that they needed Christ's righteousness to justify. He declared them spiritually dead in need of the Spirit of God to quicken.

So these effects were not due to Paul's charisma, nor the force of his words or his speaking ability, nor any external appearance in Paul or Silas nor anything done by them. It was the power of God that effectually worked to bring these brethren to believe on Christ.

1 Corinthians 2: 1: And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2: For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3: And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4: And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Is this how you were brought to believe on Christ? Did God send the gospel to you in spirit and in truth? Was the message the truth of God's electing grace in Christ? Of Christ's success in redeeming his elect? Did the Spirit of God quicken you. This is how God's saints know our election of God. It is by the message God sent and the effectual work the Spirit worked in our heart to make us cast all on Christ as our only Righteousness.

WE KNOW BY THE JOY IN THE FACE OF AFFLICTION

1 Thessalonians 1: 6: And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:...

Paul knew their election was of God because they followed Paul and Silas and the Lord Jesus with joy in the face of much affliction.

Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice...and they follow me" (Jn 10: 27). Our brethren at Thessalonica were not ashamed to identify publicly with Christ. They were not ashamed to identify with Paul nor their brethren. And they did so with joy. This was certainly the power of God because it was in the face of much affliction—"having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." Immediately these new believers were persecuted and afflicted. As soon as God called them they witnessed Paul and Silas shamefully treated by men.

Acts 17:5: the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Unbelievers tried to turn these new believers from Christ. But these new believers continued following the Lord Jesus joyfully. Unbelievers tried to turn them from Paul and Silas. But no amount of affliction could stop them from publicly identifying with Paul and Silas who preached the gospel to them. They rejoiced over the preachers Christ sent them as Christ said his saints would, saying, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom 10: 15).

Not only did they endure affliction, but these Thessalonian saints also endured this affliction with joy. They did not merely endure it. They endured it with joy in their new heart. What was their joy? They knew that what they were enduring was a light example of what Christ endured for them—"Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross." When God afflicts one of his children, the Spirit blesses us to see more of what Christ endured on our behalf. That is how he makes us endure the affliction with joy.

Men called our Lord names and went about trying to turn men against him. He suffered great affliction at mens' hands, even to the death of the cross. But he did it for us. So Christ never turned from us. He never denied us or forsook us. Our faithful Redeemer endured the shame for us. Why? "For the joy set before him." His joy was glorifying God the Father and saving

his elect from our sins; his joy was sending this good-news to us and making us one with him and all those in his house. That is Christ's joy that he spoke about giving his people, "These things have I spoken unto you, that MY JOY might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (Jn 15: 11). That is the joy he puts in our hearts to make us willingly bear affliction and continue believing. Christ and his people are one in affliction and joy. Christ said,

John 15:20: Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

Philippians 1: 29: Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for His sake.

So by the power of the Spirit, the Thessalonians saints were not ashamed of Paul and Silas nor of Christ. They endured the affliction with joy, together with Paul and Silas and their brethren. Christ said of those *not* born of the Spirit, they...

Mark 4:17:...have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

But the affliction did not make these Thessalonian brethren to be offended. It did not make them stop publicly identifying with Christ nor with Paul. By the word, the Spirit had knit their hearts together with Christ, and with Paul and Silas who preached the word to them, and with their brethren in Thessalonica, as well as their brethren in Judea who they had never met.

Sorrow from without could not destroy their inward joy and fellowship in Christ. This is another way the word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Our Lord will make those he has knit together in heart endure affliction together for his sake by the power of the Holy Spirit and makes us do so with Christ's joy in our heart.

WE KNOW BY LOVE FOR CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

1 Thessalonians 1: 7: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8: For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. 9: For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; 10: And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Paul knew their election by their love for Christ and love for his people.

When the gospel comes in power, by the gift of God, the believer turns to God from idols to serve the living and true God, that is true repentance and faith. These Thessalonians renounced all their former religion and works as sin and vanity, worthless. They became Christ's servants. Christ gave them something better.

A toddler was at a fish restaurant one night. It came time to go and the little boy would not let go of a corncob. He had eaten the corn and now was sucking the butter out of the cob. His parents tried everything. Finally, the owner of the restaurant asked if he might try. The parents welcomed it. The owner pulled a Hershey bar from behind his back. Immediately the little boy dropped the corncob and latched on to the chocolate bar.

Christ is that better thing. He makes us see our need for him to save us. Beholding him we see our vile sins. HE makes us let go of a false profession and vain hope and sin and lay hold of Christ. He keeps making us want to know more of Christ and more of his power. The Spirit keeps growing us in faith and repentance. He makes us desire to be found in Christ alone.

Philippians 3: 7: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Not only did the Spirit created a new heart of love for Christ in them, but he also created in their hearts love for their brethren. Therefore, they sent the gospel far and wide. Their faithfulness spread abroad—*"For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing."*

Everywhere, brethren heard about the affliction they bore and their steadfastness to believe God and continue sending the gospel forth. They kept ministering to lost sinners and needy brethren by sending the gospel. Due to the love God put in their heart for Christ and for brethren they kept sending financial help to other churches. By doing whatever they could to help their brethren have the gospel they proved Christ was their life.

They did it persevering in faith: waiting, watching, looking for our living Redeemer, our Deliverer, to return—*"And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."*

This is the result of God electing his people unto salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world. These are things our risen Redeemer works in his people by the power of the Spirit, through the gospel, because he has delivered us from the wrath to come. He shall send the gospel to all those he redeemed! He shall work this in all his people! He shall not lose one! Are you one of the elect?

Amen!