



HOW WE KNOW WE ARE CHOSEN BY GOD, PART 1

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Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- Last week, in our second lesson in this new series, we looked at why Paul was thankful for this new church in Thessalonica.
 - Besides the fact that Paul encountered a lot of disappointments in his ministry of planting churches, and...
 - ...besides the fact that he'd gotten a good report from Timothy on how **this** little church was doing, Paul outlined three reasons why he was thankful.
 - In **1 Thessalonians 1:3**, Paul commends this new church for:
 - ✓ Their WORK produced by faith,
 - ✓ Their LABOR prompted by love,
 - ✓ Their ENDURANCE inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- These three things are laid out clearly in **vs. 3**. We explored why these three qualities are demonstrations of a healthy church and a healthy individual faith.
- We learned the following:
 - **First**, their WORK produced by faith means Paul was thankful for WHAT they do **because** of WHAT they have.
 - ✓ Paul was pleased they had put their faith into practice. It's a '*work OF faith*,' and not a '*work FOR faith*.'
 - ✓ This quality, as we saw, had nothing to do with work-based salvation. That's not a Biblical concept since the Bible is clear that Jesus did it all.
 - ✓ Paul's delight is in the truth that REAL faith shows up. REAL faith cannot be hidden. REAL faith is demonstrated, and it turns belief into action.
 - The **second** thing Paul was thankful for is their LABOR prompted by love.
 - ✓ We learned the definition of 'labor' here means something performed under great distress. It's toil, and it's uncomfortable. It's difficult and stressful.
 - ✓ The point is genuine Christian living and ministry are often marked by challenges. The Bible tells us that many ways and many times.
 - ✓ And that is why this kind of labor goes against all the values of this world, but it proves our faith is intact.
 - ✓ It proves we have the right motives and perspectives, and that – in turn – means our faith is central in our lives.

- The **third** quality Paul saw in this little church that he was thankful for was their **ENDURANCE** inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ This means the **true** believer – and the **true** church – is marked by cultivating a proper forward-looking perspective.
 - ✓ This is all about persevering now as best as we can - but being most convinced and preoccupied with what is **yet** to come. This is a quality that identifies our top priorities.
 - ✓ It's about hoping for something wonderful that is yet unseen. This requires our personal discipline.
 - ✓ Paul saw this little church showing that kind of hope and endurance.

NOTE: These three qualities provide critical **evidence** of a genuine saving faith. This is a divinely inspired fact in God's Word that cannot be overstated.

Real faith is much more than a one-time event. It's much more than casual lip service. It's proof that is seen in ongoing choices and commitments, often in the face of great struggles.

It comes down to our convictions and actions. These things **prove** our salvation. It comes down to the truth that real faith shows up, and this is why Paul was thankful.

NOTE: With these things in view, I have called this lesson, "**How We Know We Are Chosen by God, Part 1.**" Paul now transitions into his natural next thought.

He brings up God's election and love. He shows how these attributes of God are clear in these believers' transformative salvation.

A. Paul's assurance of the genuineness of their salvation

NOTE: I want to look at three Greek terms in **vs. 4**. We need to see Paul's **specific** intentions as he writes to this little group of Thessalonian believers.

1. The first term is the word '*know*.' This is the Greek word '*oida*' (*OY-duh*), and it's used to emphasize a **CURRENT** situation:
 - It's a **present tense** verb – Paul knows **RIGHT NOW** that this little group in Thessalonica are true believers.
 - He is convinced right now – he wasn't convinced yesterday; it's not about being convinced tomorrow – he's convinced **NOW** they have true salvation.
 - Paul **KNOWS** this, not by some special revelation from God, not by his own intuition gained from personal experience - but rather, Paul **KNOWS** this from observing these believers' words, actions, and attitudes. He sees the evidence.
2. The second Greek term is underneath the English phrase '*loved by God*,' and it is '*agapeo*' which is a derivation of the word '*agape*' that we learned about last week.

- The word means an ‘active love which is given APART from whether someone deserves it or not. It’s love which seeks that person’s best interest.’
- As we learned last week, this ‘agape’ love is what Jesus Christ showed to each of us by His death on the cross in payment for our sins.

Romans 5:8 says, “But God **demonstrates** his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (This is ‘agape’ love).

- And Paul is saying here to this little group of believers, I KNOW God loves you with a love that has your best interests at heart.
3. The third term I want to look at is the Greek term ‘ekloge’ (eck-loh-GEY) which literally means ‘your election.’
- It’s the term underneath the word ‘chosen’ or ‘selected’ in our English translations, and it literally means that these Thessalonian believers were ‘elected.’
 - They were ‘chosen by God.’ They arrived into the fold of salvation ‘through God’s loving, sovereign purpose.’ There was ‘no human merit or wisdom involved as part of the process.’
 - Paul is reminding them that God, from eternity past, independently and supremely chose them for salvation - drawing them to Himself over time, and through various means, by the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - This same Greek word was used twice by Jesus Christ Himself in **John 15:16** when He was talking to His disciples. He said to them:

*"You did not **choose** Me, but I **chose** you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you."*

NOTE: So, let me summarize what Paul is saying to them from the last two verses:

“My companions and I are convinced that God has chosen you to receive His saving grace. This is evident from your words and actions which you have demonstrated under great trial. Your changed lives reveal God’s choice of you and your faith.”

NOTE: This is reminiscent of what Paul wrote to the believers at the church in Ephesus in **Eph. 1:4-5**. It was there that Paul also said, “For He **chose** us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In **love** He predestined us for **adoption as His sons** through Jesus Christ, according to **the good pleasure of His will...**”

NOTE: Here you see the very same things emphasized:

- God **CHOSE** you for salvation,
- He demonstrated His love for you which had your best interests at heart,

- God did all this according to His perfect will and pleasure.

B. This raises the obvious question, “Insofar as salvation is concerned, does Jesus Christ choose us, or do we choose to receive Him?” (AS DIFFICULT AS IT MAY BE TO UNDERSTAND, THE ANSWER FOR BOTH IS, ‘YES.’)

1. The doctrine of sovereign election confuses some people, frightens others and offends many. To be honest, I’ve seen this issue divide churches and cause others to fall away from the faith.
 - But none of these kinds of responses is justified according to God’s Word.
 - Paul was thankful as he explained this concept to these Thessalonian believers, and as believers ourselves - we should be thankful too!
 - Someone once said *“Try to explain sovereign election, and you may lose your mind. But try to explain it away—and you may lose your soul!”*
 - As humans, in our limited minds, we are always troubled with wondering who exactly is in control of our eternal destiny - - is it us, or is it God?
 - IMPORTANT: We will **never** understand all that is involved in God's election of us on this side of heaven, but we should not ignore this important doctrine that is taught throughout Scripture.
 - To be perfectly clear, the fact that one is elected or chosen cannot be known until **after** a person has been saved.
 - That is why Paul was able to recognize that the Thessalonians were chosen – they were sovereignly elected - by their response to the Gospel.

NOTE: At some point in this series, I think we need to have a couple of lessons on this matter of ‘sovereign election versus free will.’

NOTE: It’s an important matter that is often referred to by the terms ‘Calvinism vs. Arminianism’ - - - but for now, let me just say a few things:

- a. The Bible teaches both: God chooses us, and we choose Him.
- b. *“Tensions in our theology keep us faithful,”* and this challenging matter is just one indication that we serve a great God who cannot be put in a box which is defined by human parameters.

In **Isaiah 55:8-9**, it is God speaking, and He says, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

- c. It is fruitless, it is foolish, and it is a waste of time to try to confine our understanding of God by human definitions. He is infinitely larger and greater than anything we can comprehend.

- d. This all plays into the truth that our God is a JUST God. In **Rev. 20:11-15**, we read about The Great White Throne Judgment. You don't want to appear at this event – because everyone that DOES is unsaved.
- e. But the point of The Great White Throne Judgment is the record of everyone's life – their choices, their actions, their priorities in THIS present life – will be made clear.
- f. And what will be made most clear is these people did NOT choose God for salvation as they should have done. *'Books will be opened,'* and this truth will become obvious.
- g. Those who are guilty of not accepting Jesus Christ for salvation will KNOW they are guilty of this tragic fact. They will perfectly comprehend this awful situation at that time.
- h. But here – and for today's purposes – let's focus on what Paul is saying. He is driving home the point that God CHOSE these Thessalonian believers for salvation, and Paul says the evidence of this is clear.

NOTE: What are the specifics of that evidence? Paul states these things in **vs. 5**, and this evidence is more granular than what he had previously mentioned in **vs. 3**.

NOTE: Let's identify the points Paul makes in this verse, because they further detail out the evidence that God CHOSE these Thessalonian believers for salvation:

C. Paul says, “our gospel did not come to you in word only,”

NOTE: Here, we see that Paul describes HOW the Gospel came to this little body of believers; it came as MORE than just human dialogue or communication.

1. We need to clearly proclaim the true Gospel. That is our primary obligation. It needs to be plainly, fully, and truthfully declared.
 - Then we need to let it do its supernatural work. Only the true Gospel can accomplish that.
 - That's basically what Paul is saying. He adds that there was another dimension at play with his words.
 - He says this because he knows no person's speech - however eloquent or moving - is effective by itself in evoking faith from those who hear it.
2. Paul is VERY aware that human agency by itself - no matter how capable it may be – is unable to achieve a supernaturally changed life.
 - This fact is affirmed in **2 Cor. 2:3-5** where Paul says to a different body of believers:

“I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.”

- We often think of Paul as a great orator, a great speaker, as someone who has a keen acumen for matters of doctrine. And all of that is true....
- But here, in this passage from **2 Corinthians**, we see the same point Paul makes in **1 Thessalonians 1:5** - - the impact of the Gospel relies on **God's power**.
- This is one of the specific pieces of evidence that God **CHOSE** these Thessalonian believers for salvation: their conversion was not the result of Paul's words alone.

D. Let's take a brief look at "the Gospel coming with power."

NOTE: This important matter of the 'Gospel coming with power' is essentially divided up into three important considerations.

NOTE: Paul's words were used – yes! His message was heard – yes! However, that message also came (1.) "in power, (2.) in the Holy Spirit, and (3.) with full conviction." Each of these conditions are needed for us to see the whole picture.

1. FIRST the Gospel came "**in power**" –

- This means there was an inherent power that resided in the spoken message that Paul delivered.
- The true Gospel's nature was divinely 'energized.' It's why Paul said in **Romans 1:16** that he, "*was not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,*"

NOTE: We ought to find comfort in this. This truth should encourage each of us to share the divinely powerful life-giving message of the Gospel.

- The effect of the Gospel does NOT depend on our eloquence, our intelligence, our position in life, our education, etc.
- Rather, it depends on our faithful declaration of it, and the inherent power of God alone.
- The gospel is the power of God because it transforms lives:

2 Cor. 5:17 says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*"

- The power of God that is in the Gospel changes us. We go from 'old' to 'new.'
- We are a 'new creation.' That is a change brought about by the power of God.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*"

- Here we see the Gospel is two things: 'alive' and 'active.'
- Because of the power of God, the Gospel message gets through all the clutter and chaos of one's life and it impacts our most hidden and secret parts.

- There are multiple passages in God’s Word which affirm the impact of the Gospel comes down to a power of **spiritual persuasion and conviction**.
- It is not a power that requires an accompanying display of miracles- though miraculous demonstrations MAY sometimes be included when the Gospel is presented.
- It’s worth noting that Paul rarely alludes to his power of working miracles, and he makes no mention of it here with this new Thessalonian church.
- That insight stands in contrast to many within charismatic circles today who often claim that a ‘miraculous’ element is needed to prove salvation.
- That is not a Biblical premise. While miracles are sometimes seen – particularly on the frontiers of ministry where the Gospel has not been heard before - it is not an issue we should expect or FORCE (I think that often happens – and it’s not genuine).
- The power of the Gospel proceeds from its core—the person and work of Jesus Christ.

2. The **SECOND** and **THIRD** conditions are (and I’ll deal with these two elements together since I think they are easier to understand that way) - - the Gospel came to this body of believers in Thessalonica **‘...with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.’**

- This is a clear reference to the **agent** and **process** by which a proper Gospel message is properly received.

NOTE: Here is a sound way to think about these two conditions: remember our previous study in *Jonah*? We learned Jonah was a *‘prophet of God.’*

- When Jonah finally did what God wanted him to do, when Jonah finally declared the message to the Ninevites that God wanted him to declare, we saw that there was an immediate impact. **His message came with power.**
- Jonah’s message was not only **inspired** by God, but we learned it was directly **given** by God.
- And within the larger context of Scripture, it makes best sense to understand that Jonah’s message was guided by the Holy Spirit, even though the OT calls it *“the word of the LORD.”*
- **2 Peter 1:21** helps us to comprehend these events with Jonah insofar as his message to Ninevah was concerned. It says:

*“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along **by the Holy Spirit.**”*

- That Holy Spirit element was true for the OT prophets who were divinely inspired to declare *‘the word of the LORD.’* It was also true for those men who were divinely inspired to write the Scriptures.
- I think it’s a reasonable conclusion to say that Jonah, in his ministry, was compelled by the Holy Spirit.
- The active triune nature of God is evident in the Scriptures from **Genesis** through **Revelation**.
- But my operative point is this: Jonah’s message was simple, *“In forty days, Ninevah will be destroyed.”*
- It’s not really a Gospel message like what Paul delivered to the Thessalonians, but like the Gospel, it came *‘(via) the Holy Spirit and with great conviction.’*
- Jonah spoke the truth that God wanted him to speak, and the Holy Spirit went BEFORE Jonah, prepared the hearts of the Ninevites, and convicted those that heard what Jonah said.
- In **John 16:8**, we see that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is one of *‘conviction of sin.’* This was not only true in Jonah’s time and ministry, but Paul says this *‘deep conviction’* was true in his ministry among the Thessalonian believers.
- It will be true in the Tribulation era too after the true church has been raptured out of this world.
 - Some people claim the Holy Spirit will be completely gone at that point – having been removed from this world when the church will be removed.
 - But that’s not true. The Holy Spirit will still be here – active and animate, STILL convicting this world of its sin. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent.
 - That’s the only way people AFTER the Rapture will still come to salvation. The Holy Spirit’s presence and convicting ministry will still be in effect.

NOTE: So - in review - we see the Thessalonians' deep, inward, and personal persuasion of the truth of the Gospel was evidence of the Holy Spirit's convicting work in their hearts.

They understood Paul’s message to be more than just Paul’s words – they knew it to be divine. They received the Gospel as they did because of the *‘power of God.’* These things all contributed to Paul **knowing** that God had CHOSEN them.

E. I just want to make a couple of comments on the last phrase in **vs. 5** – *“You know how we lived among you for your sake.”*

1. The believers at Thessalonica were fully aware of the behaviors, habits, and manners of Paul and his companions when they were among them. Paul was confident in his own example.

- Paul, and his companions, lived their lives as a glowing testimony to the power of God and the truth of the Gospel.
 - Paul is going to give more details on his conduct and character in the next chapter of **1 Thessalonians**. We will see that then.
2. But his point NOW is he backed up his words, he backed up the truth of the Gospel, and he backed up the integrity of his ministry by showing behavior that was consistent with all these things.
- Paul's motive was he worked to 'give' rather than to 'get.' Paul's message was confirmed by his character.
 - A sobering point is our behavior can often short-circuit the effectiveness of the Gospel.
 - One of the best and clearest messages we can give to others is the example of our personal lives when we live in consistent holiness.

NEXT TIME: Our next lesson will be **"How We Know We Are Chosen by God, Part 2."** We will continue to look at the ways our lives and choices confirm our true salvation.



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The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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