



## HOW WE KNOW WE ARE CHOSEN BY GOD, PART 2

Week #4; Feb. 1, 2026, 11AM

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Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools  
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### Review:

- Two weeks ago, in our third lesson in this new series, we looked at **vss. 4 and 5 of 1 Thessalonians 1.**
- We began to explore the ways our lives and our choices confirm our true salvation. I called that lesson "**How We Know We Are Chosen By God, PART 1.**"
- Today is **PART 2**, and next week we will look at **PART 3**. That will wrap up **Chapter 1**.
- Paul has introduced the matters of God's election and God's love to this new body of believers in northern Greece.
- He shows in **vss. 4 and 5** how these attributes of God are self-evident in these believers' transformative salvation.
- Paul was assured that these new believers were true Christians, and he specified three reasons why he felt as he did:
  - FIRST, the Gospel came to these people '*in power.*'
    - The true Gospel's nature was displayed – and it was divinely energized.
    - The Gospel is the power of God because it supernaturally changes one's life, making them a '*new creature in Christ.*'
  - SECOND, the Gospel came to them '*with the Holy Spirit.*'
    - The Holy Spirit went ahead of Paul; it was active in the way these new believers received the Gospel as they did.
    - Their hearts were prepared to receive and respond to the truth.
  - THIRD, the Gospel came with '*deep conviction.*'
    - The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to '*convict the world of its sin*' according to **John 16:8.**
    - Paul saw this process in his ministry there. These new believers were not *casual* about their sin – they were *convicted* about their sin.
- All said, these believers understood Paul's message to be more than just Paul's words – they knew it to be divine - and they responded the right way to it.
- They received the Gospel as they did because of the '*power of God.*' The Holy Spirit had prepared their hearts to receive it, and they were convicted by the truth.
- These things all contributed to Paul **knowing** God had CHOSEN them for salvation. These things were evidence that they were truly saved.

**NOTE:** Now, in **vss. 6-7**, Paul continues to clarify his personal assurance that these new Thessalonian believers were truly ‘in Christ’ – – – that they were CHOSEN BY GOD.

**NOTE:** In **vss. 6-7**, we now see what these new believers DID. We see their results. Their **response** was seen in **vss. 4 and 5**, and now we see their **results** in **vss. 6-7**. We now see their actions as confirming they are ‘new creatures in Christ’.

**NOTE:** Let’s work our way through this passage and see what these **results** are. Let’s see what actions these new Thessalonian believers displayed that confirmed they were CHOSEN BY GOD.

**A. FIRST, they became imitators of Paul and of Christ.**

**Important question:** How many of us would be confident in someone else’s salvation because they became ‘imitators’ of our own personal example?

1. That’s a probing and uncomfortable question, but this was Paul’s confidence.
  - He was assured of his own **position** and his own **posture**, and so he was able to rest on these two very important criteria.
  - Paul knew HOW he had come to these Thessalonians, he knew WHAT he had said to them, he knew WHY he had done what he’d done, and he knew WHO he served.
  - Paul’s life – in every way – exemplified his faith, his convictions, and his service. And so he was pleased to see others imitating him.
2. This is a core issue in what is meant by ‘*making disciples*.’
  - What we see here in our text today is Paul living out Jesus Christ’s command in **Matt. 28:19-20**. That passage reads:

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

- We hear a lot of churches emphasizing the need to ‘*make disciples*.’ When I look at a lot of church websites, that’s what they claim their mission is.
- That’s good and proper to do that. It’s Biblical. It’s what we all need to be doing – individually and corporately.
- But how many of those churches have leaders in them who can honestly say to the world-at-large like Paul does here: “I want people to imitate MY personal example; I want them to be like ME”?
- My guess is the answer is ‘very few.’ I’m not sure I would want anyone to ‘imitate’ me. I’m often not the example I wish I was.
- But when we ‘*make disciples*,’ we are – in essence - seeking to duplicate ourselves. We want to produce someone else that puts Jesus first.

- We want to reproduce another who obeys the Lord, produces good fruit, loves others - - and who in turn, makes more disciples. Repeat.
- I'm guessing that these words are awkward for many of us to hear. They are awkward because we are uncomfortable in some way(s) with who we are.
- But that's not Paul's situation here. He has lived a life where a radical change has shown up.
- He's sold out to God, he's sacrificial, he's service-oriented, he's unselfish, and his life will show he's '*faithful even unto death*' (**Cf. Rev. 2:10**).
- Paul knows these things about himself. This is why he was able to write to the Corinthian believers in **1 Cor. 4:16** and say to them, '*Therefore, I urge you to imitate me...*'

3. These new believers watched the Holy Spirit control and enable the lives of Paul and his companions.

- And so - BY the same Holy Spirit - they became imitators of what they saw.
- The writer of the book of **Hebrews** (probably also Paul) says the very same thing.
- **Hebrews 6:12** instructs us to be '*imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*.'
- This all boils down to the truth that a good example is one of the highest forms of instruction.

**NOTE:** Let me challenge each of us to be imitators of great Christian examples. May I suggest that you read two books (biographies): '*Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*' is one, and the other is '*Through Gates of Splendor*.' I cannot urge you enough to read both – they are life-changing.

4. Those are some comments on how these new believers 'imitated' Paul – but we also see that they '*imitated the Lord*.'

- Notice the order here – Paul mentions being '*imitators of us*' and then he mentions being '*imitators of the Lord*' after that.
- While we may be tempted to think the order should be the other way around: 'Jesus first and THEN Paul' - we need to see this is a natural order.
- Think about this from a missionary standpoint - and think about the new converts that missionaries have.
- Even before that missionary's Gospel message is fully understood or personally accepted, those that hear the Gospel message are observing the outworking of what's being said to them in the life of **that** missionary.
- When the Holy Spirit convicts them, and when they believe the Gospel, those new converts will naturally look to that missionary to learn how to live the Christian life.
- This is essentially what Paul is saying: He has reflected the **right** message in the **right** life and **right** work of himself - - there is a natural order here.
- Paul is simply outlining the basic order of these new believers' experience.

- With the issue of discipleship in view, as believers grow in their faith, they turn from a human example to the active pursuit of Jesus Christ -- at least, it **should be** that way.
- It is a very sobering matter to understand that other people are supposed to be able to see Jesus Christ in us.
- There is a pre-eminent principle here: Paul is FIRST and FOREMOST an imitator of Christ. His own nose is pointed in the right direction.
- He is focused on who **he** needs to be focused on. He knows that. It is why Paul writes in **1 Cor. 11:1**, "*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*"
- Jesus Christ is our great example. It is ultimately Jesus we must imitate, and Paul knows that too.
- All believers are called to be copies of Jesus Christ. Paul is merely acknowledging the process through which some achieve that.

**B. The SECOND thing these new Thessalonian believers showed that confirmed they were chosen by God, is they received the message with joy DESPITE their severe suffering.**

**NOTE:** This is not a natural response; it is a supernatural response. It is not a display of human nature; it is a display of Godly nature.

1. Some translations say, '*welcomed the message*' and other translations say, '*received the message*.'
  - The point is the same with both. The Greek word is '*dechomai*', (*DEGH-om-ai*), and it basically means they "put out the welcome mat" for God's truth -- just as one would invite a good friend or guest into one's house.
  - It's the same word used of the Bereans in **Acts 17:11** – "*they received the Word with great eagerness.*" It's an indication of a definite act, or a choice.
  - Unfortunately, not everyone displays this same receptive attitude toward God's truth, and as time wears on – there will be fewer and fewer who do.
  - In **2 Thessalonians 2:10-11**, Paul says there will be those after the Rapture and during the rise of the antichrist who will "**not receive** ('*dechomai*') *the love of the truth that they might be saved. For this reason, God will send them a powerful delusion so that they believe THE lie.*'"
  - Note the order. Their choice to NOT receive the truth reaped the consequence of being set up to believe THE lie.
  - Truth holds us accountable, and so many people will reject it. Most people do whatever they can to cling to what they most want to believe about themselves (much to learn later on this....)
  - But that's not the situation here with these new Thessalonian believers. They received God's Word the right way.
2. We see, too, they received the message despite severe suffering.

- These new believers in Thessalonica were experiencing severe persecution, but what confirmed they were CHOSEN BY GOD was they never lost their joy in the process.
- In fact, Paul writes these believers again in **2 Thessalonians**, and there he commends them again in **Ch. 1:4** "for (their) perseverance and faith in the midst of all (their) persecutions and **afflictions** which (they) endured."
- The Bible teaches that tribulation, trials, suffering, etc. are the normal experience of true believers. This is repeatedly emphasized throughout the NT.
- In fact, Jesus' last words to His disciples before leaving the upper room were: "*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world.*" (**Cf. John 16:33**)
- Paul and Barnabas cautioned the churches of Galatia that it is "*through many tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of God.*" (**Cf. Acts 14:22**)
- The reality of the faithful believer is we will face many trials and sufferings. It is PART of proving ourselves to truly be IN Christ, it is PART of showing we have 'the real deal.' (and that leads to the related point here: 'joy')

3. These new believers in Thessalonica showed the "*joy given by the Holy Spirit.*"

**NOTE:** Their 'joy' – their choice to preserve a proper attitude and perspective in the midst of their trials – was further evidence that they were CHOSEN BY GOD.

- This means their 'joy' was energized by the Holy Spirit. This gets back to the '*fruits of the Spirit*' in **Galatians Ch. 5**.
- One element of the fruit of the Spirit in **vs. 22** is joy, and that joy is something we possess that is independent of our circumstances.
- We naturally tend to think we gain contentment and joy as a result of our circumstances. This type of joy is **dependent** on the things we have.
- But Paul is talking about a deeper and more profound type of joy that is **independent** of the things we have.
- That is clear in the way that these new believers *received the word with suffering and joy*. Their joy had nothing to do with what they faced; it had everything to do with what they HAD.
- This whole issue of 'joy' goes one step further in **James 1:2-4** where we are instructed to:

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

- Here in **James**, we see that this kind of Spirit-enabled 'joy' is not only a mark of being CHOSEN BY GOD, but it is also an exercise of our will.

- Being as we can see the bigger picture, being as we know what our true goals need to be, and being as we are equipped to have a proper perspective on our trials, we have the choice to exercise this kind of Spirit-enabled joy.
- It's the joy that comes from recognizing our faith is REAL. It's the joy that comes from welcoming the tests of our faith – so that it may grow and mature.
- It's the joy that comes from placing value and priority on the sincerity of our faith above all else.

**NOTE:** Here's the BIG BOTTOM LINE: this issue of joy is all about exposing what is most important to us.

- ✓ If we are living for the things of this world and the pleasures of this life – we simply won't have that kind of joy when we face troubles.
- ✓ If we are '*conformed to this world*' – then we will display the world's responses when we face suffering and trials.
- ✓ However, if we value our faith above all else, and if we value what awaits us eternally, then our present sufferings are seen as opportunities to know we are CHOSEN BY GOD.
- ✓ This is not a natural response, but one that is energized by the Holy Spirit as Paul says.
- ✓ We must be continually seeking to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and when we show this big picture joy in the midst of trials, it is affirmation that we're CHOSEN BY GOD.

### **C. The THIRD thing these new Thessalonian believers showed that confirmed they were chosen by God, is they became 'models' to others.**

**NOTE:** Some translations say these believers became a 'pattern' or an 'example,' and the New Living Translation states their impact to be '*to all the Christians in Greece.*'

1. Let's look at this word 'model' for a moment. I want you to see a process here:
  - Paul imitated Christ. The Thessalonian believers imitated Paul as they then - subsequently - learned how to imitate Christ.
  - Then, these believers became models to others. Their example spread.
  - The salvation experience of these Thessalonian believers became known far and wide. Macedonia is the region north of Thessalonica; Achaia is south of Thessalonica.
  - In other words, their impact and testimony began to have a widening effect. This happens when God is truly at work in a body of believers.
2. It is worth noting the only church Paul ever called an **example** was this church here in Thessalonica.
  - It was this body of believers that provided a pattern for what other churches ought to be both in spiritual growth and in ministry.

- As we've learned, they had a **work of faith**, a **labor of love** and a **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ (we learned all about those things in **vs. 3**).
- They manifested **joy** during **tribulation**, and this – undoubtedly – was a source of great encouragement to other believers.
- Often the most powerful testimony of an individual believer or a body of believers is during times of great trial, pain, and persecution.
- When we endure the right way under suffering – others take notice, and they are encouraged by our example.
- That goes with being a member of the body of Christ. What happens to us impacts others who we are part of.
- And if you glance down at **vs. 8** for just a moment, you will see their example was even more than this – they '*rang out the Lord's message*.'
- They turned around and proclaimed the truth of the Gospel themselves. They began to do what Paul had done.

**NOTE:** So why were they such a great model? They were the complete package! The things they became, did, said, endured, and exercised showed clearly they were CHOSEN BY GOD.

**NEXT TIME:** A whole new aspect of **How We Know We Are Chosen By God** opens up next week as we look at these believers' **reputation**. That will be **Part 3**.

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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.

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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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