

*1 Thessalonians 1:4-5***PREFACE**

We are still inside Paul's formal greeting to the Thessalonian believers, but already we are learning much about them. These are not just gracious but empty words of introduction; these words comprise a biographical sketch of this church. Already we have learned that

- it is a true-gospel church, "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v1b);
- it is an active church, its members working out their faith in love, and their steadfast hope in Jesus Christ;
- their active faith is energized by the knowledge that everything they do is in the sight of (and for) their "God and Father."

Just three verses in and already we have discovered that we can learn much from this body of believers.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5.

I love the angle here. Last week Pastor Jeremy's sermon was from Luke 6:43-49; from that we learned that one way we *can* know the heart of someone is to observe the fruit of their life.

Read Luke 6:45.

Another way to know whether someone is a true disciple of Christ is to look at the conduct of their life—specifically, do they endeavor to follow the commands of Jesus, or is their "devotion" just empty words.

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Here in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians we have one more way to know whether someone is a child of God. How did they know that the brethren were "beloved by God," and were His chosen? Because they received the word as only Christians could, "in power and in the Holy Spirit."

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

v4

If we whittle down vv2-4 to the essentials, it would be

We give thanks to God for all of you... for your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... knowing, beloved brethren, His choice of you.

How Paul was able to say this we will address in a moment; let's first consider *what* he is saying. Paul is saying two things in v4:

- God loves them, and
- God chose them

That pairing is not inconsequential, for Scripture tells us that God's love is the *basis* for His choosing.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians we have the succinct version; in his second letter Paul fleshes it out a bit more.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

I do not intend for this to be an in-depth study of election, or “predestination.” But we do need to understand the concept to the extent that Paul mentions it in these letters. In the second passage he states that “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.” Which raises the question: beginning of what? We find the answer to that in Ephesians.

Read Ephesians 1:3-6.

Sidebar: The preferred translations make “In love” the beginning of the sentence in v5, rather than the end of the sentence in v4. All do this but the KJVs.

So Paul in his letter to the Ephesians clarifies that “beginning” in 2 Thessalonians means “before the foundation of the world”—i.e., before Adam. And in all three passages he includes, in one form or another, that this selection was done, by God, for no other reason than his love for us. Remember last week’s quotation by Robert L. Thomas:

This is no mere emotional response prompted by the desirability of, or affinity for, the person loved, though feeling certainly is not absent from it. It is ultimately traceable to the *will* of the one who loves. He *determines* to love and does so no matter what the condition of the one loved. Such is God’s love for man... (italics added)

So v5 in Ephesians:

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the *kind intention of His will*, (italics added)

In the [handout](#) you’ll find Wayne Grudem’s list (also mentioned last week) showing the steps of salvation in order. And note that first in the list is “Election.” Steps two through ten would never occur at all if not for “the kind intention of His will”—out of His love for them alone—to elect, to choose those who will belong to Him in Christ Jesus. [Back to Thessalonians](#).

v5

In v4 Paul declares that the Thessalonians were loved by God and that they had been chosen by God. Verse 5 offers the basis by which he can make that declaration. And I don’t know about you, but it is something I had not considered before.

Read v5.

Once again the interpreters come at this from more than one direction—but, happily, this time we do not need to choose between them. The truth becomes even more impressive when we *combine* the two interpretations.

the messenger perspective

The first way to interpret this verse is from the perspective of those *bringing* the gospel message—that is, Paul and his companions. They delivered the gospel

- in word
- in power
- in the Holy Spirit
- with full conviction

Obviously the gospel came to the Thessalonians *en logo*, the spoken word—but not mere eloquent and learned discourse. Paul says that that there were supernatural powers behind those words.

power = *dynamei* (doo'-nuh-may)

With the addition of one letter this word would refer to the performance of miracles, but this word “primarily points to the inward power with which the speakers were filled as they gave the message” (Thomas). As the apostle spoke to the Thessalonians he could feel the power of God working in him.

Holy Spirit = *hagios pneuma*

Clearly the aforementioned “power” was generated by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and, as Thomas points out, the third Member of the Godhead “supplie[d] a sense of divine reality to the spoken message.” The old-fashioned word for this is *unction*, which means an anointing.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon: One bright benison [blessing] which private prayer brings down upon the ministry is an indescribable and inimitable something—an unction from the Holy One... If the anointing which we bear come not from the Lord of hosts, we are deceivers, since only in prayer can we obtain it. Let us continue in constant fervent supplication. Let your fleece lie on the thrashing floor of supplication till it is wet with the dew of heaven.

full/deep conviction, much assurance = *plerophora polle*

Unless I am mistaken, since *plerophora* includes the idea of fullness, this could actually be translated “much full conviction.” This means that the apostle and his fellows experienced perfect assurance as to the truth and effectiveness of their message. And once again, the generating power of this confidence would have been the Holy Spirit.

Now, this is all well and good; Paul and his fellow missionaries could certainly have experienced all of this. But I think it taxes reason to claim this as the means by which “knew” that the Thessalonians had been chosen by God—i.e., were now Christians. I have gleaned some of the descriptions above from Robert Thomas’ commentary (and other commentators share his view), but what he writes at the end left me scratching my head.

Such subjective certainty, sensed by Paul and his associates, served as a major ingredient of this first proof that these readers had been chosen by God.

But common sense tells us that we could stand before someone, presenting the gospel, experiencing *everything* inside us just as described by Paul—and have the gospel message *not* find purchase in the unbeliever to whom we are speaking. *How would what I am feeling tell me what the other person is feeling?* Which brings us to the second interpretation.

the recipient perspective

Verses six to ten give evidence for the second perspective; v6 will be sufficient for right now.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6 [NIV best]

Now of course, the Spirit comes into a life from God alone; man has nothing to do with it. But from a strictly imaginative, human perspective, it was as if there occurred a miraculous transference of the Spirit from the speakers to the listeners in Thessalonica. The missionaries felt it in themselves, and as they spoke the gospel to them, the Spirit took root in the recipients as well. And in the rest of Chapter One Paul itemizes the change in their behavior—the outward sign of their inward conversion.

So if we come at v5 from the recipient perspective, it adds extra color to the event.

for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power

What can be more powerful than the power that converts the soul from death to life. The good news the apostle brought was not some theoretical proposition to be rationally discussed and debated, but a radical, life-changing force. This is why we do not change our life so as to become a Christian; we require the supernatural power of God, through the Spirit, for that life-change to take place. Albert Barnes writes,

There was great power manifested in the gospel in its leading them to break off from their sins, to abandon their idols, and to give their hearts to God. There is no more striking exhibition of his power over mind than in a revival of religion. There is no where more manifest demonstration of his presence than when, in such a revival, the proud are humbled, the profane are awed, the blasphemer is silenced, and the profligate, the abandoned, and the moral are converted unto God, and are led as lost sinners to the same cross, and find the same peace.

and in the Holy Spirit

All of this is orchestrated and conducted by the Holy Spirit. He is the one who, sent by the Father, reaches down into the soul to let loose the power that changes lives.

and with full conviction

It is a given that Paul and his fellows were fully assured, had full conviction of the gospel they preached. But if this speaks of those *receiving* the word, it means that they received it fully, wholeheartedly. Albert Barnes again:

It was not embraced as a doubtful thing, and it did not produce the effect on the mind which is caused by anything that is uncertain in its character. Many seem to embrace the gospel as if they only half believed it, or as if it were a matter of very doubtful truth and importance; but this was not the case with the Thessalonians. There was the firmest conviction of its truth, and they embraced it “heart and soul.” From all that is said in this verse, it is evident that the power of God was remarkably manifested in the conversion of the Thessalonians, and that they embraced the gospel with an uncommonly strong conviction of its truth and value. This fact will account for the subsequent zeal which the apostle so much commends in them.

We will include the end of v5 in our next session, including it with v6, but let's just touch on it now.

...just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

How did Paul know about this transformation in the hearts of the Thessalonians—how could he write about it, so confidently, in his letter to them? Because it was clearly evidenced in them before he left Thessalonica—because he observed that they observed them, and began taking on some of the behavioral traits of the missionaries. Here was the *external* that gave evidence for the *internal* transformation.

Here is Albert Barnes again:

He means here that he and his fellow-laborers had set them an example, or had shown what Christianity was by their manner of living, and that the Thessalonians had become convinced that the religion which they taught was real. The holy life of a preacher goes far to confirm the truth of the religion which he preaches, and is among the most efficacious means of inducing them to embrace the gospel.

What Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter to them I believe could also describe what occurred in Thessalonica, because it was his standard *modus operandi*.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

I have learned, over the fifty-seven years I have been a Christian, that the life we *show* the unsaved speaks with far greater eloquence than the words we speak. The power of God's Spirit, active in a life, is the believer's most effective tool to reveal the actuality of Christ to those who are lost.

A LOVING CHOICE

...knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;
1 Thessalonians 1:4

“The Order of Salvation”

1. Election (God’s choice of people to be saved)

2. The gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel)
3. Regeneration (being born again)
4. Conversion (faith and repentance)
5. Justification (right legal standing)
6. Adoption (membership in God’s family)
7. Sanctification (right conduct of life)
8. Perseverance (remaining a Christian)
9. Death (going to be with the Lord)
10. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)

We should note here that items 2-6 and part of 7 are all involved in “becoming a Christian.” Numbers 7 and 8 work themselves out in this life, number 9 occurs at the end of this life, and number 10 occurs when Christ returns.

(from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, p. 670)

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Session 4

THE
THESSALONIAN
LETTERS