

Knowing Your Election ó Part I

(I Thess. 1:4-6)

By Randy Wages

3/8/09

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. **Introduction:** Today we will be taking a look at Paul's 1st letter to the church at Thessalonica, so be turning there to I Thess. chapter 1. As you turn, I will introduce today's message by reminding you of a familiar verse taken from II Peter, chapter 1. There in vs. 10, brethren (or believers) are exhorted to *give diligence to make... <their> ... calling and election sure.* This exhortation clearly presupposes the truth of election ó a truth that is undeniable if one believes the Bible is true. The scriptures make it abundantly clear that God has elected or chosen a people from all eternity ó chosen or elected them unto salvation in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. If you doubt that, just get a concordance and search the words, *elect*, *election*, and *chose* or *chosen*. If you go through that exercise and you're honest with yourself, you'll either have to concede to the truth of God's election or else admit you just don't believe those particular biblical passages are true.

Well, today I would like to begin a 2 part study of I Thessalonians, verses 4-10. In today's segment we will concentrate on verses 4-6 with plans to examine vs. 7-10 next week. And in these verses that we'll be covering this week and next, we have set forth the evidences whereby we might heed the command to believers found in II Peter ó to make our calling and election sure.

Now today's text actually begins with verse 4, but to avoid beginning in the middle of the sentence, let's begin reading back in verse 2 where Paul writes, "*We give thanks to God always for you all,* <and it continues saying> *making mention of you in our prayers; ³Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;*" And so as we begin today's text in vs. 4, we see that it is the closing of a sentence that actually began back in verse 2. That is, from vs. 2 this would read, "*We give thanks to God always for you all,* (and the thought continuing into vs. 4), "*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.* And it's from this phrase that I've derived the title for these messages, *Knowing Your Election*, today's segment being Part I of II.

II. Verse 4:

- A. Now if your Bible has cross references like mine, you'll notice that the literal reading of the verse would be, *Knowing, [brethren ó beloved of (or by) God], your election.*

B. Many would prefer not to be confronted with that bit of information as they would prefer to imagine that, given the sentence arrangement provided by the King James translators, that this speaks of your election of God or of your choosing Him rather than the other way of around. Well, as I noted, that would be contradictory to all of the other passages that deal with God's election or His choosing of a people unto salvation in Christ. To quickly set that argument aside, turn with me a few pages back to Ephesians Chapter 1. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul writes, beginning in verse 3, í . (Read Eph 1:3-7). Here, as in so many other places it is clear that God the Father has chosen a people in Jesus Christ, God the Son, unto eternal salvation.

C. And let's be clear that a consideration of God's election of a particular people is meaningless apart from a consideration of what they are elected or chosen unto. And here we see clearly that it is an election unto salvation in and by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Verse 5: (Read)

A. Now notice that vs. 5 begins with the word òforö which means òbecause.ö Paul is saying we know you to be beloved of God, brethren, elected unto salvation because í . And he proceeds from here in verse 5 through the end of the chapter to give the evidences whereby he is able know their election. And that is what we will focus on this morning.

B. First we notice that the Gospel comes to the elect of God.

1. All of God's elect in each and every generation are providentially brought to hear God's gospel.
2. And Paul called it òourö gospel. Well, hold your spot here and let's look back in Acts chap. 17 at how that Gospel message that was first delivered to the Thessalonians is described. (Read Acts 17:1-3.) You see the Gospel message sets forth more than the mere historical fact of Christ's death and resurrection, but rather in the Gospel we see the necessity of it. He came to die to save a people ó the elect of God. And He had to come out of that grave for God the Father is just and justice was satisfied by His obedience unto death whereby He established a righteousness, a satisfaction of infinite value on behalf of and for His elect. Now, turn back to I Thess. 1.

C. We see that it is this very specific message of the Gospel (the one Paul called òour gospelö) that God's elect are brought to hear. Oh, but to God's elect it doesn't merely come to their physical ear. Here in I Thess. 1:5 he says we know your election for ***"...our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance..."***

III. Verse 5, C ... in power, in Holy Spirit, & In Much Assurance (Con't.)

1. You see, God's elect are given spiritual ears. In Matthew 13 we have recorded the discourse between our Lord and the disciples who asked Him why He spoke in parables. And he said there that it wasn't given to some to know the mysteries of the kingdom. In other words they were not chosen unto salvation. In vs. 13, He said He spoke to **"...to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."** And then in vs. 16 of Matt 13, He goes onto say, **"But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."** There's a miraculous spiritual life given to God's elect whereby this Gospel comes to them not **"...in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."**
2. The Gospel comes to God's elect in power. Paul wrote to the Romans that the Gospel was the power of God unto salvation í .for therein is the righteousness of God revealed. (Rom 1:16-17). The Gospel when made effectual to a sinner is life giving ó it is the word of regeneration. It comes in power to God's elect. There is a revelation when God's word comes in power ó the righteousness of God is revealed.
3. The Gospel comes to God's elect in the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit. Has the Gospel come to you in the Holy Ghost? Well in John 16, Christ related the work of the Spirit that takes place in the elect believer's heart, i.e. ó one to whom the gospel comes to ñin the Holy Ghostö or Holy Spirit. In John 16:8, Christ explains how the Holy Spirit reproves (convinces or convicts) them of things they naturally and previously were oblivious to saying, **"And when he <speaking of the Holy Spirit> is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:"**
 - (a) Of sin ó (Including the sin that deceives us all ó the ñdeceivableness of unrighteousnessö)
 - (b) Of righteousness ó (Perfect satisfaction to justice)
 - (c) Of Judgment ó (Sin judged and Satan defeated; Righteousness being the standard of judgment)
4. Now back to our text, we see in I Thess. 1:5 that the Gospel comes to God's elect, (1) not only in power, and (2) in the Holy Ghost, but (3) in much assurance. You see, if your gospel ó how you perceive it is that God saves a sinner ó is not one in which you have every reason to be fully assured, then you have no warrant (at least at this time) to judge yourself to be among the elect of God ó chosen to salvation in Christ. For God's sheep (His elect), the gospel comes to them in full assurance. You see, to truly trust in Christ is to trust in one who cannot and did not fail. As the angel of the Lord told Joseph, Mary would bring forth a son conceived of the Holy Spirit (a God-man, a holy thing) and he told Joseph that he was to **"... call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people <His elect> from their sins."** (Matt. 1:21).

III. Verse 5, C, 4) ...in much assurance (Con't.)

- (a) Over the ages, countless religious folks have expressed the thought, "It's not Christ that I doubt, but it's me or my faith or faithfulness that I worry about." Well, if you're worried whether you, your faith, or your faithfulness will measure up, the problem isn't the degree or quality of your faith, but rather the object of your faith. You're not looking to Christ alone and you really do have a lot to worry about. Such sentiments are held by those who have yet to truly turn to Christ for all of their salvation and repent of having imagined that they could save themselves. When such thoughts persist, they give evidence that: either (1) God's Gospel (wherein His righteousness is revealed) has not yet come to you, or (2) if it has, it has not come in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance. For such a focusing on one's own failings is not trusting on Christ alone, who cannot fail, and suggests that there has yet to be any convincing by God's Spirit of the sin that we're all blind to ó of imagining that salvation must be conditioned at least, in some ever so small way on me, (i.e. ó on my faith, my faithfulness, etc.).
- (b) But to trust on Christ, having been convinced of His righteousness as my only hope and ground óa righteousness I cannot merit but rather must have been freely imputed to me just as my sins were imputed to Christ ó is to have no confidence in the flesh (the work of my hand), but rather to put all my confidence in Him, based solely upon His finished work on the cross. We can have full assurance that He could not and did not fail at what He came to do ó to fulfill the law perfectly, every ó jot and tittle, ö to redeem a people, the elect of God ó to save them from their sins.
- (c) As we've already seen, the record of Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica is recorded for us in Acts 17. In that chapter, we learn that he left there and went on to Berea and from there, on to Athens where he gave his famous sermon on Mars Hill. And near the end of chapter 17 in vss. 30-31, Paul concluded by saying that God now ***"...commandeth all men every where to repent: ³¹Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."*** It got the job done. Righteousness demanded life and so it was He lived. But Christ didn't live, die and rise again for Himself, but for a people ó the elect of God ó who likewise shall surely live. And when it pleases God in each successive generation, the Gospel shall come to His elect in this full assurance of faith.

D. Now notice at the end of vs. 5, Paul adds, “...*as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*” It is true that Paul, Silas and Timothy had conducted themselves honorably during their visit to Thessalonica when they first brought the Gospel to them. We see this in 2:10 (Read). But in the context of chapter 1, I believe Paul’s phrase at the end of vs. 5 is simply an expansion upon the evidence that these believers did not merely receive the gospel in word only, as if it were merely the words of men.

1. I think he is conveying as he had to the Corinthians in I Cor. 2:4-5 where he said, “*And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*”
2. And as he continues the letter to the Thessalonians, look with me in chapter 2. (Read 2:2-5, 13).
3. The message of God’s truth, the Gospel, that was delivered to these elect Thessalonians was not diluted nor camouflaged in order to make it more palatable to their fallen natures and natural disposition to find something within themselves of which to boast. The offense of the cross is not removed from the message whereby God’s sheep are brought to see of their desperate need for mercy and of their hopelessness outside of the mercy and grace in having the merit of Christ’s work ó His righteousness ó put to their account.
4. And their being so persuaded was not the product of man’s eloquence or power of persuasion, but instead it is a product of that which only God’s Spirit can effectually work in the sinner ó as He ultimately does in the beloved of God ó His elect.

IV. Verse 6: (Read)

- A. In I Cor. 11:1, Paul wrote, “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*” Paul is speaking to them of their oneness and like-mindedness in Christ, noting how these Thessalonians were drawn to follow them, having embraced the same gospel message.
- B. Consider the conditions under which these elect believers of Thessalonica received the message of the Gospel that Paul, Silas, and Timothy first brought to them. In I Thess. 1:6 we just read how they “...*received the word in much affliction...*” or tribulation. Had we continued our reading in Acts 17, we would have read how these believers had consorted or identified with them and their message, how the unbelieving Jews gathered a mob and there was uproar in the city, as they spoke of how Paul and his company had turned the world upside down. And ultimately, as charges of sedition were leveled, we read how it troubled the people. It was so bad that they whisked Paul and Silas out by cover of night to proceed on to Berea. They received the word in much affliction.

IV. Vs. 6 (Con't.):

- C. Well, as you can see from the tenor of my message, I truly believe that this passage is intended to be instructive and portraying the evidences whereby the elect of God in each and every generation may be identified. It is relevant to our day. I will cover this more next week, but if you scan ahead to verses 7 and 8, you'll see one of the reasons why I believe this is an appropriate application. Notice in verse 7, Paul continues discussing how he knew of their election, saying, "**⁷So that ye were ensamples** <that word means a die, a stamp, a pattern, and as such ó an identifying characteristic> **to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.** **⁸For 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;...**" In every place your faith toward God is made known, you're a pattern.
- D. Accordingly, here in vs. 6, we know that there is a sense in which all true believers (the elect of God for whom Christ died and merited this work of the Spirit for them, spiritual life itself) ó they all receive the word in much affliction. Just as they accused Paul and Silas of turning their civil and governmental society upside down, the reality is that this gospel message turns our world upside down. That's why God calls on all men everywhere to repent. It is a 180 degree reversal of the "**...way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death**" (Prov. 16:25). Now concluding that you've been tragically mistaken, having revealed unto you that the true and living God and His way of salvation is altogether different than you had imagined does equate to quite an upheaval. The ramifications are unsettling and troubling. It is a bittersweet gospel and you won't have any of it unless God does a work. Why, we discover not only our error, but the evil of having presumed that a thrice holy God would accept me, a sinner, based upon something that proceeds from me, a sinner, when it took the precious blood of a Savior. And we suddenly discover that all of our likeminded fellow religionists and family members are likewise deceived. And it does sadden us.
- E. Consider Christ's own words in Matt. 10:34-37: ***Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*** **³⁵For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.** **³⁶And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.** **³⁷He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** God's elect receive the word in much affliction.
- F. And yet, look at the end of verse 6: They also receive it "**...with joy of the Holy Ghost:...**"

IV. Vs. 6 F. "with joy of the Holy Ghost" (Con't.):

1. As I consider vss. 5 and 6 together, I am reminded of Romans 14:17 where God tells us through the Apostle Paul that **"...the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."**
 - (a) You see, to be translated out of darkness into His marvelous kingdom is to have that righteousness revealed to us under the preaching of this Gospel of grace.
 - (b) And thereby, we discover the only way reconciliation can be made between a holy God and a sinner such as we ó how peace can be and was made.
 - (c) And in that peace is much assurance in which the elect of God are brought to rejoice in great joy.
2. How wonderful it is when one discovers the reality of their terminal, seemingly hopeless condition, but to also discover that a cure has been delivered unto them that they neither sought nor desired ó but rather one they were simply chosen unto ó a cure procured for them by the precious blood of their Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. What joy! What good news!

V. Closing:

Well, I began today noting how believers are exhorted to give diligence to make their calling and election sure. But what about you who have yet to embrace this message ó as you hear of what at first may seem to be an unfair premise to you? You're confronted with the clear scriptural assertions that the elect (chosen by God), and they alone (for whom Christ came, lived and died) shall be saved.

Speaking from my own experience ó I know that upon being confronted with the undeniable biblical truth that God elected or chose a particular people to be saved, it was only natural to ask myself the question, "Well, how can I know if I am one of His elect ó one of the chosen?" Now there is no problem with that question other than it is one that it is often asked in a vacuum. Always remember, that election is unto something ó unto salvation in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, based solely upon the work He accomplished in His life and death on the cross.

We see in the scripture, that the gospel message is accompanied with God's command to believe it. That is, we're told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's also revealed that sinners such as we will only do so if God the Holy Spirit grants us spiritual life, faith and repentance ó evidences that manifest themselves without fail in each elect sinner's heart. Why? Because they were purchased for them at the cross of Calvary by the One who cannot and did not fail. Thereby, we see and embrace our desperate need for what He alone could and did accomplish in satisfying the justice of God as a Substitute for His people, the elect.

The command is not to believe that you are one of the elect ó a command that might prompt one to seek some means of determining whether they are a chosen one apart from examination of the gospel evidences of repentance and belief of the truth of God's gospel. As Paul and Silas had told the Philippian jailer just prior to traveling on to Thessalonica, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”*** (Acts 16:31). But the gospel message of grace itself excludes any notion that it is your believing that does the saving. In fact, the gospel of grace necessitates the truth of election. If God didn't do the choosing, then it must be something found favorable in the sinner and that's not grace, but works. Grace excludes any notion of worthiness in the sinner. No, God's gospel reveals the righteousness of another ó the impeccable righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I like how one old writer illustrated the wrong reasoning of so many when they first give consideration to the doctrine of election. He described it like this. A man is starving for food. He will die if he does not eat. And by God's providence someone places a plate of food before him. Now does this man who is dying with hunger halt and say, “Well, I'm not sure if this food was really intended for me or not, so I'm just not going to eat?” Well if he didn't eat, most of us would say, “You fool. Someone was kind of enough to bring this food your way and you, though starving to death, you wouldn't have it.” No ó he would eat unless he's lost his mind. Why? Because he's starving, he's hungry. He wants to live.

So, that brings us to the real issue, “Are you hungry for this food ó the bread of life, Jesus Christ's Person and redemptive work as it set forth in the Gospel?” Do you see, as the Thessalonians were able to see, the necessity of Christ's life and death on your behalf? As Paul had taught them ó how He must needs die and be raised again? Must you have it? Will nothing else suffice for you, as one convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgment? Has God likewise turned your world upside down, showing you your desperate need for this righteousness ó a righteousness that you cannot produce nor do anything to acquire? If so ó eat! Thank God for drawing you in the day of His power to His table. For only the elect partake thereof of the bread of life.

Our Savior put it this way in His Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5:6, saying, ***“Blessed <eternally> are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”*** Are you hungry for the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel ó that satisfaction which Christ alone rendered at the cross of Calvary for all the objects of God's everlasting love? If so, sit down and eat. Eat at the table of God's elect. Thereby you can know your election.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.