

**1 Thessalonians 1: 4-7; "Knowing your Election by God",**  
**Sermon # 4 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered**  
**by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 10th, 2008,**  
**in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The doctrine of Election has been one of the most controversial doctrines in theology, in the history of the church. Even many Christians are reluctant to believe that God chooses certain persons to eternal life and passes by others, because they think that if this is true, that God is cruel and unfair. If He chooses one, why does He not choose another? And if a person's salvation is based, 1st of all, on God's choice and not man's; this seems to interfere with man's free will and his ability to determine his own destiny. And if man cannot determine his own destiny, then he is a puppet on God's string. It doesn't matter what he does, because after all, he is either one of the Elect or he is not. So; some people reason, Election if it is true, must simply be God's choice of certain men based on their choice of Him. God looks down the corridors of time, before the foundation of the world, and he sees that certain men will hear the gospel and make the right decision concerning their need of Christ. This is the Arminian view of God's work in salvation. And it affects their whole view of evangelism as well. What proceeds from this faulty view is the idea that if fallen men can just be exposed to the information of the gospel that they will, if it is presented lovingly and respectfully to people, they will respond by "accepting" Christ. Now I believe that the gospel needs to be presented lovingly and thoughtfully, but I am quite sure that even an Arminian Christian should come to the conclusion, after looking at people for awhile, that many people who hear the gospel presented in the most winsome and loving way, never come to know the Lord. Why not? It was not the loving or diligent use of means; for those were used. I would say to you, and the Bible says to you, that if they go through their whole life, rejecting the Christ of the gospel, they will be damned for their sins at the Last Judgment. This is man's nature, and his choice is to reject Christ no matter how often he is told that he needs Him. They will be condemned and sent to the lake of fire, not because they were not chosen, but because they loved darkness more than light because their deeds were evil. But if they ever come to salvation in Jesus Christ, I assert to you, it will be because God who is great is mercy has chosen them to eternal life.

The Biblical facts are these; that when Adam fell in the garden of Eden, we all fell with him. By nature we are in Adam, and we are sinners by

nature and practice. We want our own way and not God's in everything that we do. We do not want to hear that we are sinful, polluted, rebellious and condemned as we are in ourselves. We do not want to seek God on His terms of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not want to be hemmed in by His laws or believe that we need His grace and favor in order to please Him or in order to go to heaven. "There is none that seeks after God, no not one." "They are all turned aside." "They have all become unprofitable." If this is true, and Romans 3 expressly declares that it is; then God must choose us or we will never be saved at all. The reason that any man is seeking after God is because God is working in his heart that it may be so. His seeking may take years before he finds God. He may have to seek through all the religions of the world and seek for truth in all the wrong places before the Lord finally opens his eyes to the truth that he is a sinner needing to be saved, and that he must have Christ. But the reason that men come to Christ is because they are chosen and they are drawn by the Father. "No man can come to me," says the Lord Jesus, "unless the Father who sent Me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day." So God's choice to set His love on unworthy, undeserving, and rebellious sinners is all of His free grace. There is nothing in the one He chooses which determines His choice. He chooses before time began and before we are ever born. He chooses according to His eternal purpose.

If this is the case, then we need to ask the question this afternoon; "How could Paul say in verse 4 that he "knew" that those believers who he was writing to, there at Thessalonica, were "Elect?" Because that is exactly what he is saying. It seems very presumptuous for one believer, even if he was an Apostle, to say such a thing. Was it because he had the extraordinary gift of discerning the spirits of men; a supernatural ability to tell whether the truth of the matter was in these Thessalonian believers? This is not what our text intimates. Actually Paul concludes that these believers are elect based upon tangible things that he observed about their conversion which convinced him most definitely that they had been chosen by God and he could even tell them that it was so. There may be more than 2 reasons for Paul concluding that they are Elect, if we were to draw from the entire letter, but let me give you the 2 reasons that are found in verses 4-7. Paul knows that the beloved brethren to whom he is writing in Thessalonica are Elect, 1st of all, because the gospel came to them with power. 2nd; because these believers became followers of those who preached the gospel to them even though afflicted. Next week, Lord willing, we will look at a 3rd reason which is their great desire to spread the gospel.

**So, 1st of all - Paul and those missionary men with him, knew that these believers at Thessalonica were Elect because the gospel came to them with power.** (Verse 5)

"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake." Those persons that think of the Bible as just being another book of literature are very much deceived. Those who think that the gospel is just a matter of information to be received and digested intellectually, do not understand the power of God. The Lord Jesus, when He was speaking to the Sadducees in Matthew 22: 29, men who said that there is no resurrection, said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." In the conversion of the soul both take place according to the power of the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the gospel becomes more than simple words. It becomes, and it is, the "power of God unto salvation." (Romans 1: 16) The Word of God is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword and becomes a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. How is this so? It is so because the Word of God is made to penetrate the recesses of the heart and the mind. It is designed by God, in connection with His powerful working, to cause the force of truth to be known and felt by the soul. But the power that the Apostle Paul saw in the lives of these believers was an evident observable power. It was given to them by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and conveyed to their souls by the entrance and indwelling of His Holy Spirit. How absolutely necessary it is; to not only experience Christ's resurrection power coming to my soul to change me and turn me from darkness to light; but it is also most surely necessary that I give evidence of this power to others who know to the Lord. For the sake of the kingdom of God's advance and spread; for the sake of God's name being glorified, for the sake of unity of purpose in the local church so that good works can be seen and fruit born to God in holiness. The evidence of this power is very needful and encouraging for the messengers of the gospel to see. The grace of God, when it is at work in the believer's life, is an observable thing. Sometimes we are told that we cannot tell whether a person is believer or an unbeliever, and that we should not try to judge; that we are not fruit inspectors. But I beg to differ. Jesus says that you will know men by their fruits. He says in Matthew 7: 17, "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit." "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit." Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." "Therefore by their fruits you will know them." Ah, you see that Jesus would have us to be fruit inspectors and to

judge with righteous judgment. We must be gracious and careful about our judgments. We do not have infallible insight into any man's soul. But nevertheless, grace at work in the believer's life does evidence itself; especially to those who minister the gospel.

Turn over to Acts chapter 11 and you will see more of the truth of this. In verse 19 it says, "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Lord Jesus." "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." You see this power to save was evident. The "hand of the Lord" was with them when they preached. His power was at work in their minds and hearts. Verse 22 says, "then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch." "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." Notice how it says that Barnabas "saw the grace of God." How could he see it? He saw it in the good fruits came forth from the lips and from the lives of the people that he observed. He saw the power of God at work in their bringing forth a definite and clear confession of their dependence upon Christ to not only come to saving faith, but also to do good works. But they were zealous for good works now that they were saved. He saw the fruit of the Spirit. He saw their love and care and concern for one another. He saw their patience with one another and the peace of God which ruled in their heart. He saw their great concern to do what was right, and to believe what was true. This humble attitude always characterizes a true believer. It may not, however, always be manifested in the degree and the quality that it was with these believers, as we shall see in a few verses. But it was the evidence of the Holy Spirit's working and His mighty power that Barnabas saw.

Look at Acts 15, verse 6. These are the opening statements of the council of apostles and elders which gathered at Jerusalem to decide the issue of whether it was necessary for Gentile converts to be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved. Verse 6 says, "Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter." "And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.'" There it is again. God chose; the Word was preached; and people believed. This is the power of God. "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Those words are very precious

are they not? "God who knows the heart acknowledged them." The way that he did so was in saving converting power to believe the gospel which in the case of Cornelius was confirmed by the gift of speaking in tongues. But in the case of those at Thessalonica, there does not seem to have been any manifestation of speaking in tongues or other revelatory gifts given. The Word of God was enough, when accompanied by the Spirit's power. This is also enough for us today brethren. We do not need to speak in tongues; we do not need prophetic utterance. What we need is power to believe the Word and to become doers of that written Word of God which we have in our hands. This God does give divine energy and blessing to see this happen in our day, and when He gives it, it is evident.

It was evident to the believers themselves. They received the Word "in much assurance." This assurance that they had that they had come to the truth and were doing what was right, came to them because the Holy Spirit witnessed to the hearts of the believers there, as to what kind of men these were who had come to them and preached to them the gospel. It is even the same today. Often, the level of assurance that we will attain to as a young believer in Jesus Christ, as to the genuineness and reality of our faith, comes to us based upon the Christ-like quality of life and witness that is being born to us by the ones who preached the gospel to us. What kind of spirit and power do they have? What kind of character qualities and graces do they evidence? We will say more about this when we get to chapter 2, but not only does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God, but He bears witness to the Christ-like qualities of character which we understand are in the people who have shared the gospel and their lives with us, so that we would know the truth and stand confirmed in it.

**2ndly- The Believers there became followers of the Missionary men, even though it meant affliction.**

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." We haven't the time to delve into this much today. We will more in the next sermon, but this is a second way that Paul knew that these dear people who had professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ were chosen by God. There was a lot of pressure on them not to receive the Word of God and become a Christian, but they were willing to suffer affliction in order that God's blessings of grace and His power and presence would keep coming to them with power. They had received power to become children of God. And now it had been granted to them also to suffer for His name's sake. But the wonderful thing about this grace of God, and this proves that Christ's grace is no ordinary natural working of the mind and heart of man; they received the word in much

affliction with joy, it says in verse 6. If it were the natural man receiving this Word with affliction, it would not be with joy. It would be with much sorrow and grief of heart. But these believers had joy which no one could take from them. Let me ask you whether, when you suffer for Christ's sake, dear believer; do you have this joy of the Holy Spirit? Certainly it is a supernatural grace bestowed only by the Holy Spirit. When you have it, you also have the grace to face any opposition that comes to you when you are suffering for righteousness sake. My friends, there is a real joy in knowing and serving our Lord Jesus. He stands with us and is working His grace in our hearts at the times of our most severe difficulty. It is not to say that persecution is not painful or that it is not difficult. But grace abounds to those who are committing their souls to God to do what is right. "You did not choose Me," Jesus said, "but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." Have you asked Him for joy that will surmount all of your natural fears and apprehensions? He gives a greater grace. He gives you joy which no man can take from you.