

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 1:1-6** . . . Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. [2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; [3] constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, [4] knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; [5] for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

B. Pray

II. 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

A. [4] knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.

1. This phrase “**brethren beloved by God**” is not found anywhere else in the NT. The closest phrase to it is found in **2 Thessalonians 2:13**, where Paul writes, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, **brethren beloved by the Lord** because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and [through] faith in the truth.”

2. Returning to the phrase “**brethren beloved by God**,” we see that Paul follows it with the phrase, “**His (God’s) choice of you**.” In doing this, Paul appears to be using the OT language that describes God taking the initiative in loving and choosing Israel for Himself. Therefore, the inference we draw from this is that God has taken the initiative in loving and choosing the church for Himself – which in this case is made up of the believers in Thessalonica.

a. An example of this kind of OT language – and probably the language Paul is referencing – is found in **Deuteronomy 33:12**, where Moses refers to the tribe of Benjamin as “**beloved of the Lord**” – which, interestingly, is the tribe Paul was from (**Philippians 3:5**).

- b. We get a fuller, more detailed picture of God taking the initiative in loving and choosing Israel in **Deuteronomy 7:6-7**, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your **God has chosen you** to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. [7] The LORD did not **set His love on you nor choose you** (*notice who took the initiative in loving and choosing*) because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples (*they hadn’t done anything to deserve being loved and chosen*).
 - c. We get a less detailed version of God taking the initiative in loving and choosing a people for His own possession in **Deuteronomy 10:14-15**, “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. [15] Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to **love** them, and He **chose** their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.”
3. In **John 3:16**, Jesus used NT terms when speaking of God taking the initiative in loving unbelievers: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
4. Paul adds NT details to this truth in **Romans 5:6-9**, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. [8] But God (*going far beyond what one might do for a righteous person, or even a good person*) demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”
5. And in **Ephesians 2:3-7**, Paul uses different imagery to explain that God took the initiative in loving and choosing unbelievers for Himself. “Among them (*unbelievers*) we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of (*deserving*) wrath, even as the rest. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our transgressions (*living in sin and deserving God’s wrath*), made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [6] and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly

places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

6. What this means for us today is that just as God took the initiative in loving and choosing Abraham and his descendants – who became the nation of Israel – so God has taken the initiative in loving and choosing us to become a part of the Body of Christ, which is the church.
 7. And to discourage pride or an elevated sense of self-importance from setting in, I want to remind you that according to **Titus 2:14**, God did not do this for our sake, as if we are the important ones in this story, but for His own sake – for this verse says that God did this to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.
 8. Therefore, may we always be humbly grateful that we have been included among those God is loving, choosing, redeeming, and purifying to be a people for His own possession.
- B. I want to spend a few minutes talking about the word **choice** in **vs 4** as it is used in the phrase, “[God’s] choice of you.” I am well aware that the words **chosen** and **elected** (*which come from the same Greek word*) are commonly identified with Calvinism and Reformed theology. Yet neither Calvinism nor Reformed theology pre-date Paul. In fact, these teachings did not come into the church until the Reformation in the 1500's.
1. So though it is true that God chooses and elects, it is also true that God saves whoever calls upon Him for salvation.
 - a. We know God saves everyone who believes in Jesus because of **John 3:16**: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
 - b. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter confirmed that God saves everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord, for we read in **Acts 2:21** that Peter said, “It shall be that **everyone** who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”
 - c. And Paul affirms this truth in **Romans 10:13**, where he says, “Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be saved.”
 - d. In pointing this out I am not intending to take anything away from God taking the initiative in choosing and electing a people for His own possession, but rather to remind you that God also operates in the realm of free will – which is why it is important

to hold these two truths simultaneously, even though many in the Body of Christ treat them as contradictory and so pick one over the other as if the other cannot be true.

2. In **vs 4**, Paul speaks of God's **choice** of the Macedonian Christians. One of the ways to understand Paul's use of this word in relation to the church in Thessalonica is to reference Luke's account of God sending Paul to Macedonia. We read in **Acts 16:6-10**, that "[Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy passed through the Phrygian (*FRIJ ih uhn*) and Galatians region, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in Asia; [7] and after they came to Mysia (*MISS ih uh*), they were trying to go into Bithynia (*bih THIN ih uh*), [but] **the Spirit of Jesus (HS) did not permit them**; [8] and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas (*TROH az*). [9] [where] a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia (*mass uh DOH nih uh*) was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." [10] When [Paul] had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us** to preach the gospel to them.
 - a. We see in this account that God forbid Paul to speak the gospel in Asia and Bithynia. And instead, God sent him to Macedonia. One way to understand this is that God chose the Macedonians over the Asians and Bithynians to receive the gospel.
 - b. However, it seems obvious that this was not an eternal choice, for history tells us the gospel eventually went to the Asians and the Bithynians. So what was God choosing? I read the story as God was choosing where to send Paul first.
- C. Continuing on, I want to give you a few additional ways – not competing or contrasting or alternative ways, but additional ways to see what the scripture means when it talks about God choosing us.
1. In **Ephesians 1:4**, Paul says "[God] chose us in [Jesus] **before** the foundation of the world (*Notice the timing, for like Israel, God is choosing before we have done anything to deserve being chosen.*), **that we would be** holy and blameless before Him (*Notice the purpose of God's choosing.*)"
 2. Peter says that Christians are chosen, "according to the foreknowledge (*which is knowledge before or prior to something happening or someone appearing*) of God the Father and by the sanctifying work of the Spirit **to obey** Jesus Christ and **be sprinkled** with His blood (*Again, notice the purpose*)" (**1 Peter 1:2**).

- a. What we see in **Ephesians 1:4** and **1 Peter 1:2**, is that God chose us long before we were born, and His purpose in choosing us is so that we would be holy, blameless, obedient to Jesus, and be sprinkled with His blood – or in other words, be made acceptable to God.
 3. In **1 Peter 2:9**, Peter says that Christians are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, for God's own possession, **so that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him** who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
 - a. What we see in this verse is that God made us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation so that we would proclaim the excellencies of God to the world around us.
 - b. This is similar to Jesus’ words in **Matthew 5:16**, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”
 4. There is no question about God’s sovereign choices or election. There is no question about God making these choices before the world was created, or at least before those chosen are born. There is no question that God’s purpose is to have a godly people for His own possession, set apart from the rest of humanity by living a holy, blameless, and obedient life that shows the rest of the world how glorious and holy and loving and gracious God is. And there is no question that all this is done within the realm of free will, which means God receives whoever calls upon the name of the Lord.
- D. Moving on to **1 Thessalonians 1:5**, we see that the next thing Paul does is verify God’s choice of the Thessalonians, and he verifies this by pointing out three facts.
1. **First**, in **vs 5**, Paul says that his gospel did not come to them in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.
 2. **Second**, in **vs 6**, Paul says that the Thessalonians believers became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, **and of the Lord**, having received the word in much tribulation [yet] with the joy of the Holy Spirit.
 3. And **third**, in **vs 7-10**, Paul points out that the Thessalonians Christians became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

4. In all three cases, the proof that God chose them was in the effect the gospel had on them. And with this in mind, let's look at these three proofs of their being loved and chosen by God.
- E. [5] for our gospel did not come to you in word **only** (*as information, or an idea, or a theology, or a set of facts verifying the existence of God, the work of Jesus Christ, and the truth of the scriptures, or a well-reasoned presentation – all of which are good yet insufficient on their own*), but **also** in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.
1. **The gospel came in power** – It is the power of the gospel, or the life of the living word, and sometimes the addition of signs and wonders that promotes a faith in God that produces obedience to God. Paul affirms this truth in his letter to the church in Rome and the church in Corinth.
 - a. **Romans 15:18-19**, “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, [19] in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”
 - b. **1 Corinthians 2:4-5**, “My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”
 - c. Do you count on God or ask Him to add power to your words when presenting the gospel to the unbelievers in your life?
 2. **The gospel came in the Holy Spirit** – It is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit that produces a proper understanding of the gospel and the evangelistic message. It is the Holy Spirit who produces conviction of sin, a right view of righteousness, and the practical application of the truth resulting in repentance and a changed life. And it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and guides the new believer into all the truth necessary to live a godly life.
 3. **The gospel came with full conviction (or assurance)** – In other words, the response to the gospel by the Thessalonian believers evidenced a conviction or assurance that it was true and the right thing for them to do was to believe it, and believing it, live it.

- F. Paul goes on to proclaim the effect the gospel had on them in vs 8-10. [8] For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. [9] For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, [10] and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

III. Conclusion

- A. Have you considered what effect the gospel has had on you – and specifically how you think, what you crave, your more common attitudes, how you speak to others, how you live day-by-day, who you care for or serve or help in some way, and how others see you?
- B. When speaking to unbelievers, do you want and therefore ask God to empower the gospel, and to make the Holy Spirit active in the situation and in the people you are talking with?
- C. The Thessalonian believers evidenced a clear and obvious change of life, a change of life that sets an example for us, and we will look at that more closely next Sunday.