

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Identifying the Elect, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

Code: 52-3

As you know, we've been looking at this chapter for the last couple of weeks under the title, "Identifying the Elect." And I suppose that you would all agree with me that nothing is more important in this life than having a proper understanding of your spiritual condition. Certainly that is of grave concern to those of us who understand what our spiritual condition needs to be. I am frequently asked, "How can I know I'm really a Christian?" I think that barely a month passes by that I do not have occasion to speak to someone in our church who is wondering about whether they are generally saved. Certainly not a week passes by that we don't receive mail from people who are struggling to identify their true spiritual condition.

It is also true that we are concerned not about ourselves alone, but about others as well. A wife is very often concerned that the salvation her husband claims is in fact real. A husband occasionally may be concerned that the salvation his wife claims is real. Very often we as parents might be concerned that the salvation which our children once affirmed is indeed genuine. And we may have a mother and father whose salvation we question. Or we may know friends who claim to believe in Jesus Christ but we look at their life and we wonder if they really do.

We are grappling certainly with a most important and significant issue that would ever face us, namely the proper understanding of one's spiritual condition. This particular chapter is of immense help to us because in it, I believe, Paul in commending the Thessalonian believers gives us a list of ten identifying marks that point us to the elect. Even though the electing work of God was done in eternity past, in the secret communion of His own mind, it can become known to us through some manifest evidences in the lives of individuals. If I am to know whether I am a believer, if I am to know whether someone else is a believer, here then in this chapter are some marks which can become a standard by which to make that assessment.

Notice please verse 4 cause that's the key verse, as we have been noting. Paul says to these Thessalonians, "Knowing, brethren, beloved by God, your election." He says to them, "I know intuitively deep down in a continuing knowledge that you are truly brethren, you are truly the beloved of God, you are the elect." It is that which causes him in verse 2 to give thanks to God always for all of them, making mention of them in his prayers of thanksgiving. His great joy over the Thessalonians was that he knew they were the elect. He knew they were true brethren. He knew they were the beloved of God.

The question then comes, "How did he know that?" How does one know when a person is truly, genuinely a child of God? Basically in this chapter he gives us two categories into which we probe to discern the marks that identify the elect.

Category number one, present condition...Category number two, past conversion...present condition is his concern in verse 3; past conversion, his concern in verses 5 to 10. But both of those categories blend together to give us a series of marks by which we can identify a true believer.

Keep in mind the Thessalonians had only been in Christ for a very brief time, only a matter of a few months. Paul had spent a brief time there evangelizing the synagogue on three Sabbaths and then certainly spending a little longer time there evangelizing more Jews perhaps, and certainly Gentiles. So that little church was born there as he and Silas and Timothy labored. But they were there only a matter of weeks and then they were on and forced to leave because of Jewish persecution. They went to Berea and then down into Achaia, Corinth, Athens.

And finally the Apostle Paul decides to send Timothy back to find out the condition of this little infant baby church in the midst of the lewd and immoral conduct of Thessalonica and the report comes back so good, the report comes back they're genuine, they're real, they're true and his heart rejoices and thus does he write this epistle. And with the information he has from Timothy who made the report and from the Spirit of God who knows firsthand and perfectly, he writes back this letter to encourage them to even grow stronger in the faith which they have so wonderfully manifest.

In chapter 1 comes that greatest of all commendations, he says, "I know you're real, I know you're elect." Then he gives the evidences of it. They stand as a timeless testimony to the standard of true salvation that marks anyone who is known to belong to God.

Now, first of all, we noted in verse 3 that there were three things that identified them as genuinely saved...your work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. He says...Whenever I remember you in the presence of God our Father, I remember your work of faith, labor of love and perseverance of hope. These are the things back in verse 1 that indicate to me you are a church IN God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the things that allow me to give thanks to God always for all of you. These are the things that make me know, verse 4, brethren, beloved by God, that you're the elect. It is your work of faith, your labor of love and your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those are the first three evidences...a faith that works, a love that labors, a hope that perseveres. And you noted last time in our study, the fifth chapter and the eighth verse gives those same things. It says, "Since we are of the day," that is we're believers, "let us get our priorities right because we have already put on the breastplate of faith and love and have as a helmet the hope of salvation."

There are the three things again; faith, hope and love. They are the great triumvirate of spiritual virtues and they are the evidences of true regeneration.

So we said there are three sort of foundational marks: production, that's a faith that works; affection, that's a love that labors; continuation, that's a hope that perseveres. But now for this morning, let's look at verses 5 to 10 and let's go to category two...not your present condition but your past conversion. He goes back to note how it was when they originally responded to the gospel, and what evidences grew out of that original response. He looks to the past and he remembers his initial encounter with them and how full of evidence it was of their genuine salvation.

By the way, I just want you to note that we're not looking only at the moment of gospel preaching and the moment of conversion, but at what resulted from that moment and became a pattern in their lives. But it was the moment of their past conversion that initiated it and it was evident from the very start.

Verse 5, the first word is key, "For..." It could be and perhaps should be translated, "Because..." So that verse 4 goes both ways...it is your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope that makes me know you're elect and then I know you're elect because... There's more and in verse 5 he introduces the fourth identifying mark of the elect, "For our gospel...or because our gospel didn't 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." Now that is a marvelous verse and I want you to catch the meaning of it. It is an essential verse.

He is describing, listen carefully, not the experience of the Thessalonians but the experience of the preachers who preached to them...Paul, Silas and Timothy. He is saying to them, "Our gospel...that is the gospel we preach...didn't come to you in word only but also in power and the Holy Spirit and full conviction." In other words, we were experiencing power and the Spirit and conviction when we preached to you. And that is an evidence that your salvation is real.

You say, "Well, I don't know...I don't understand the connection." The connection is very simple. The preacher, Paul, knows that when God is moving through him powerfully by the Spirit and with great assuredness and great conviction that it is so that God can do a saving work. And so he says from the very outset that, "I know you're real because I experienced such a powerful moving of God in the preaching that I brought to you." This is a thrilling concept, one which we don't see often treated in the New Testament. But what Paul is saying is...Whenever we would experience this moving power of God through our ministry, we would know that God was moving powerfully to accomplish the saving of souls. And that's his testimony. The very experience of the preachers indicated that God was saving some in that city. Our gospel, that means the gospel we preached. He calls it also "our gospel" in 2 Thessalonians 2:14. It was so much a part of the fabric of his life that it had become his own. Of course it is the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, that Jesus died, was buried, rose again the third day...that great saving gospel, but it had become so much his that he

could call it "our gospel."

By the way, the term "gospel" was used eight times in the two Thessalonian epistles. It's a major emphasis. So he says, "Our gospel came to you, the good news of salvation and there was some features in the coming, there were some things in our experience that tell us God was really at work in your life."

First of all, it wasn't just talk. It wasn't just talk. Look at verse 5, "Our gospel didn't come to you in word only." It wasn't just talk. Oh it had to come in word, no question about it. We're begotten again by the word, Peter says, 1 Peter 1. And Paul in writing Romans chapter 10 makes it very, very clear that faith comes by hearing the word about Jesus Christ. You can't get saved without the word. But it's not the word only, he says. That is so important. Faith does come by hearing, but there's more than that. It isn't just speech. It isn't just logic. It isn't just rhetoric. It isn't just clever communication. It isn't that people are going to get saved because you're interesting, or because you somehow attract their attention, or because you're clever, or because you can manipulate their mind. Not so. No matter how erudite the talk, no matter how clever the talk, no matter how intimidating the talk, no matter how subtle the talk, no matter how inviting the words, no matter how attractive the style...listen carefully...even if you speak the truth without the power of God, it accomplishes nothing. It has to have the power of God.

Why so? First of all, because in 2 Corinthians 4:3 and 4 the Bible says, "That the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto them." Even the light of the glorious gospel doesn't penetrate the darkness just by virtue of word only.

These people are blind. Not only are they blind, but Jesus said in John 3, "Men love...what?...darkness." They love their blindness. It's a comfortable blindness. They hold their sin tightly to their breast. And so you have blind men in dark who love the darkness. Word only, even the truth, can't penetrate that.

And then if you look at Ephesians chapter 2 you will note that the Apostle Paul says that men without God, without Christ are dead in trespasses and sins. And they are dead in trespasses and sins and not only enjoy their deadness but they don't desire life. Jesus said, "You will not come to Me that you might have life." So you have blind men who love their blindness, dead men who love their deadness. Word only can't penetrate it.

The light of the glorious gospel cannot shine unto them. They will not come that they might have life. The gospel must come in more than just talk. It isn't a result of cleverness, not at all. Paul told them later on, verse 5 of chapter 2, "We never came with flattering speech, we never came trying to elevate you and make you feel better about yourself. We never came with some ploy." He said to the

Corinthians, "We didn't come in the wisdom of men," either. So it isn't just talk. Words alone can't work God's eternal purposes, it can't be done. Talk won't do it, even talking about the truth.

First Corinthians 4:20, did you hear this verse? "The Kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power." So the second thing he says is, "It didn't come in word only, but also in power." Yes in word, but in word and power. The divine power was woven into the fabric of the preacher's words so that those words came forth with energy, dynamic. He's not talking about the hearer now, he's talking about the experience of the preacher. Paul is saying, "When I preached to you it wasn't just words, it was powerful and I sensed that power." He's experiencing the inward power that the preacher sometimes experiences. And it makes him aware that God is moving through his preaching.

I'll tell you, that's an exhilarating experience, one for which I thank the Lord. When you preach and when God is using you in special ways to accomplish His purpose, there is within you, and I know this from my own personal experience, an indescribable and explicable sense of the moving of the Spirit of power in your life. There are times when I preach and I know that God is working because I am experiencing the movement, the powerful movement of God in my own heart and mind.

Where does the power come from? Back to verse 5, "Not just talk but power and in the Holy Spirit." You can't separate the person of the Spirit from the power. The power is not some mystical ethereal foggy sort of non-descript spiritual substance. The power IS the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you, then you will have the opportunity to be a witness for me." When we talk about preaching with power, we're not talking about some foggy, mystical commodity, we're talking about the ministry of the Holy Spirit energizing the preacher. The two are inseparable.

So, Paul says, "When we came to you it was powerful. I was feeling the power." Again he's not talking yet about their experience of the power, he's talking about his own. He's saying we were experiencing Holy Spirit power.

You say, "Well, how do you experience that?" Well, very hard to describe. A number of things...you feel unusual energy in your heart, you feel an unusual clarity in your mind, you feel an unusual facility with the words, and there's a sense in which the Spirit of God is pulling all of the factors, all of the dynamics of communication together and something is happening which transcends you. They knew they were preaching with supernatural force. And they knew that if they were being used by God to preach with supernatural force, it was because God was going to do something with that power. They must have had confidence about Isaiah 55:11, "My Word never goes forth and returns to me...what?...void. It always accomplishes the purpose to which I send it."

Then the fourth thing they say, not only was it not just talk, but power and the Holy Spirit, but it was with full conviction. He says, "We were so assured in what we said. We were so confident in what

we said as to the truthfulness and the clarity of our message." It was straightforward. It was confident. It was bold. Paul and his fellow preachers were powerful, Holy Spirit-filled men who spoke with conviction and boldness and confidence and assurance. They lacked subtlety, folks, they weren't sneaking around the corners trying to sugar-coat the gospel to get people to believe it. They weren't working on some strategy by which they could get the non-elect saved if they could make the gospel palatable enough. They were powerful, Holy Spirit-driven, confident, assured, bold men and they knew that in that experience God was working and that He was working through them to effect something in those to whom the powerful message come. They knew it wouldn't come back void.

So, let's add a fourth to our little list of marks. A faith that works, a love that labors, a hope that perseveres, a fourth way you can identify the elect is a preaching that is powerful...a preaching that is powerful. One of the good indicators of true salvation is having sat under powerful preaching.

Now let me say it another way and I want you to listen to this. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians but they have sat under a kind of articulation of Christianity that lacks power, that lacks decisiveness, that lacks assuredness, that lacks directness. And maybe they have heard some weak, impotent, fleshly preacher spinning off clever quasi-Christian psychology and because it is couched in Christian terms, they may think they're Christians. But when someone has sat under the powerful Holy Spirit-anointed, convicting preaching of the true gospel, and they really understand it and it has come to them in the energy of the Spirit of God, that's a good indication they're dealing with reality.

So, Paul is saying the very experience of these preachers at the time of their conversion was convincing them that God was doing the saving work in the Thessalonians to whom they were preaching. And the Thessalonians knew it, too, as they experienced it. Look at chapter 2 verse 15, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God which also performs its work in you who believe." You heard it not as just talk, but the powerful Word of God working in you. So they were right, it really was powerful.

I believe one of the marks of the elect that identifies them outwardly is that they have responded to a true and proper powerful Holy Spirit-driven proclamation of the gospel. A lot of people talk about being Christians but aren't even clear on what the gospel is...to say nothing of having sat under strong conviction in the proclamation of that gospel.

Then Paul adds, verse 5, "Just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." He's saying the quality of our preaching was affirmed by the quality of our lives. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake, it was for your sake we came to you, it was for your sake we preached, it was for your sake we lived the life. And you know what kind of life we lived, so you have the affirmation of our life to go along with our message.

So, Paul is saying, "Look, there was the quality of our life and the quality of our preaching." By the way, their life among the Thessalonians was remarkable. Paul was humble, selfless, gentle, caring, compassionate, worked with his own hands so he wouldn't have to take any money from them, treated them like a nursing mother. So he says, "Look, you know our life, you know our message, a powerful life, a powerful message. You've responded then, we know, to a powerful gospel. You've seen it lived out, you've heard it preached. That powerful gospel which we experienced indicates to us that God was working in you." So Paul says I know you're elect. I know you're elect because you responded to a true and powerful preaching from true and powerful preachers.

So, we can add another word, true saving faith is not only manifest in production, affection and continuation, but in presentation. The people who are genuinely saved have sat under a genuinely powerful Holy Spirit-directed presentation. Sometimes the Holy Spirit can do that individually through your reading of the Bible. But there will be a movement of the powerful Word of God in your life. I believe with all my heart, beloved, that that is something the church cannot yield up. We cannot substitute cleverness for power and what we need today in the ministry is men of God who are filled with the Holy Spirit and are thus filled with power who preach with boldness the Word of the living God which never returns void. There is no substitute for any of that.

Now in verses 6 to 10 he moves on from his own experience to the experience of these people who have responded. And the next identifying mark of the elect he gives in verse 6, let's call it "life that is new." Not only a faith that works, a love that labors, a hope that perseveres and a preaching that is powerful, but number five in our little list, "Life that is new." He says I know you're elect because you're different. Verse 6, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord." Stop at that point.

Boy, if that doesn't say it, I don't know what would. How do I know you're a Christian and it's real? Because you became an imitator of us and of the Lord. You also, along with all the other true believers, you also became mimeti, that's the Greek word, mimetif from which we get mimics, little copies. You became little copies. And by the way, it didn't take very long, it's a transforming work. It isn't that they eventually sort of processed along until after years and years they finally were, you know, copying Christ and copying the Apostles. No. It happened right away. Paul was there a few weeks. He was gone a few months. He wrote back, got the word it had already happened. In the moment of salvation comes newness in a life that was new. And the way it showed up was instead of being copies of the ungodly, they were copies of the godly. Instead of having identifying characteristics of their father the devil, they had identifying characteristics of the Lord...which indicated they were His children. They were little mimics.

Over in verse 14 of chapter 2 it says it again. "Brethren, you became mimics of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea." Sure, you were copies. There's the evidence. New life, a little church, baby church, brand new, a few months old, didn't even have resident leadership, existing in

that pagan city of several hundred thousand people, right on the Egnatian Highway, right on the tip of the Aegean Sea, a trade center with all the riffraff that comes and goes in that environment, we described it in detail, and here they were all on their own under the power of the Spirit of God becoming imitators of us and of the Lord. That's the mark of true salvation. And God can effect that even if there isn't anybody around to help. Little copies of Christ and His followers.

They had come in contact with the model Christ through His copies, us. And he says you've become copiers of us and of the Lord. There's the evidence of regeneration. There's the evidence of new birth. There's the evidence of newness of life. Paul says in Romans 6 that when you believe in Jesus Christ you're buried with Him by baptism into His death and you rise to walk in newness of life, Romans 6:4 and following. And that's exactly what had happened. The old died and they were brand new. They were crucified with Christ, nevertheless they live, yet they didn't live alone, but Christ lived in them. And His life was manifest through them and they were like copies of Christ." That's what "Christians" means, little Christs. It's a diminutive for Christ...little copies of Christ. Their life style was different from the sorted idolatrous paganism of their past, from the legalistic self-righteousness of the Jews in their past, they had become Christians, they had become little Christs.

He says I know you're elect, I can see the newness of life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation...2 Corinthians 5:17 says...old things pass away, behold new things come." Galatians 6:15, "Neither circumcision is anything, nor non-circumcision but a new creation."

So, true faith is evident not only in production, affection, continuation, presentation but in transformation. Dr. Robert Thomas who teaches in our seminary has written an outstanding commentary on 1 Thessalonians and in it he says this, "The notion of imitating God and Christ applies especially to three things...holiness, love and suffering." Those are the three ways in which we are like Christ.

First Peter 1 makes it very, very clear, verse 15, "Like the holy One who called you, be holy yourself." So if we're like Christ, we're pursuing holiness instead of unholiness.

Secondly he says is love. Jesus said, "If you are characterized by love, all men will know you are My disciples." Paul says, "He shed His love abroad in our hearts." John says, "If we're true Christians, we manifest the love of God."

The third thing Dr. Thomas said was that if you're to be a little copy of Jesus Christ, it involves holiness and love and suffering...suffering. He says in verse 14 of chapter 2, "You were imitators of the churches of God in Jesus Christ that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings." Same as who? The people in Judea and the same as the Lord Jesus, verse 15, who was killed by the Jews.

So, if I'm to be like Christ it means like Him I pursue holiness, like Him my life is dominated by love, like Him I'm willing to suffer for righteousness sake. That's what Christ's likeness is...holiness, love, suffering.

So, he says...I know you're elect, I know you're elect because you imitate us and you imitate the Lord. Number six, the middle of verse 6 he says, "Having received the Word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit." Here is the sixth mark that identifies the elect, joy that is transcendent...joy that is transcendent. Not only life that is new, but joy that is transcendent. I want you to catch this because it is such a beautiful, beautiful and simple description.

He says, "I have no question about the reality of your faith because it was your experience to receive the Word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit." You can tell a true believer because no matter how tough it is they never lose the true joy of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit dispenses that joy to His own. "Having received the Word" means the gospel, looks back to their conversion and their response. And he says, "When the Word came and you received it, you had a lot of tribulation and much tribulation." Literally, in severe suffering--in severe suffering.

You remember what happened, don't you? In Acts chapter 17 Paul came in and preached in the synagogue three Sabbaths and then the Jews rose up and they came against him with tremendous persecution. They ran him out of town. Then he went to Berea and the Thessalonian Jews who hated him came all the way to Berea and chased him out of there. Then they went back to Thessalonica and you can believe they turned up the furnace on the believers in Thessalonica. They now no longer had Paul as their protector. There they were and they were getting an awful lot of heat. In fact, it says it in verse 14, I just read it to you, "You've endured the same sufferings as the churches of God in Judea." And to show you how severe the suffering was, he says, "It's the kind of suffering that comes from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus, who killed the prophets, and who drove us out." That's pretty strong stuff. He compares the suffering they were enduring to the death of Jesus, the prophets and the driving out of town Paul, Silas and Timothy.

The word used for "tribulation," thlipsis, means "intense pressure." It's confining pressure. They really were after Paul and they were after the church.

Chapter 3 verse 4, "Indeed when we were with you we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction and so it came to pass as you know." Sure, Paul said it's going to be a tough one, we're going to suffer and we did...and we did and they did also. Second Thessalonians 1:4, "We speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure." That little church was really being persecuted. But the genuineness of their salvation was made evident because in the middle of their persecution they never lost their joy. That is a very important point. And it wasn't human joy, it was the joy of the

Holy Spirit. It was supernatural joy, spiritual joy. It is the evidence of true salvation.

Let me compare it with something. Matthew 13 Jesus gives the parable of the sower and the seed and the soils and He said there was some seed sown into rocky ground and when the sun came out, it scorched the plant and because it couldn't go through the rock to get to the water, it died. And when He explains it He says there are some people who receive the Word with joy but when thlipsis, same word, pressure, tribulation, persecution comes, they're gone. That's human joy. That's psychological joy. That's emotional joy. That's that false exhilaration of someone who thinks they've become a Christian, who thinks they've sort of gotten to the in group or maybe they've alleviated their guilt, or maybe they've some kind of emotional needs that have momentarily been satisfied, but it isn't the true joy of the Holy Spirit and at the time of trouble, persecution when there's a cost for their Christianity, they're gone. The true Christian can face any trial, any tribulation and the joy of the Holy Spirit sustains them. That...that's...you can tell that person is a believer. He says, "I look at you, I see the joy of the Holy Spirit."

It's not unlike those in the book of Acts. Acts 5:41, you remember this. They went on their way from the presence of the Council. What had happened at the Council. You say, "They had a meeting." No, they had more than a meeting, they flogged them, verse 40, they flogged them, beat them up and told them never to speak in the name of Jesus again, then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the council doing...what?...rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name and every day in the temple and from house to house they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. That's the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Human joy will die under persecution. The joy of the Holy Spirit will live and transcend. It's a transcendent joy. In Romans it is further described as part of our state in Christ. It says that in Christ we've been justified by faith, we have obtained an introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and we rejoice in our tribulation. That's part of Christian experience. We rejoice. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy... "Rejoice always," Philippians 4:4, "and again I say rejoice." Paul and Silas knew that joy. They were in stocks in the jail, the prisoners there and they were rejoicing and singing songs.

So Paul says to the Thessalonians, "I know you're elect, I know you're real because I see your transcendent joy." So let's add another little word, jubilation...jubilation. How can you tell a truly saved person? Jubilation...add that to the evidences of production, affection, continuation, presentation, transformation.

The elect are easily recognized by a faith that works, a love that labors, a hope that perseveres, a preaching that is powerful, a life that is new, a joy that is transcendent. Number seven, behavior that is exemplary...behavior that is exemplary. Verse 7, "So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

He says...the word "example" here is tupos, it means exact reproduction. You became a model Christian for others to follow. So the imitators became worth imitating. Isn't that interesting? The imitators became worth imitating. And he says, "You became exact reproductions for all the believers in Macedonia...that's the northern province where the cities of Thessalonica, Philippi, Berea are...you became examples to all in Achaia...that's the southern province now combined in one nation of Greece where Corinth and Athens are." Their behavior was so distinctly Christian, their behavior was so distinctly God-honoring and Christ-exalting, they were not only naming the name of Christ, 1 John 2:6, but they were walking as He walked and they became models. This never ceases to thrill me because they didn't have any shepherds, they didn't have any mature leadership, they were a tiny baby church in a sea of paganism and yet the Spirit of God was working a work there. Christ was being formed in them.

They weren't perfect. In fact, Paul says in this letter to them, "I want to complete what is lacking in your faith." So he knew they hadn't arrived in perfection. But they were sure on the right track. And he says, "I want you to increase more and more in the same way you're going." But they had become, let's use the word "illustrations." They had become living illustrations of how to live. The evidence of saving faith and election is seen because their lives were an illustration, an example.

Number eight, verse 8, "A witness that is strong." Here's another mark of the elect. There's never any doubt when you see these things. A witness that is strong. I see your faith that works. I see your love that labors. I see all these other things and I also see a witness that is strong. There's evidence. Look at verse 8, this is absolutely marvelous. This is the greatest statement, I think, in any of the epistles ever made about a church's evangelistic zeal. They were the model church for fulfilling the great commission, the church we ought to pattern ourselves after.

Verse 8, "For the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you." What a statement. "The Word of the Lord" means the gospel, the divine saving truth that comes from the Lord has sounded forth, you're the point of initiation. You're where it started. The word "sounded forth," ek exechetiis used only here in the New Testament but it means to trumpet. It means to sound forth very strongly, it's a compound word, very intense. It's blasted forth, the idea is a strong, aggressive trumpeting preaching of the gospel. These were bold people. They had a witness that was strong. The word is used outside the Scripture to speak of a blaring trumpet, or rolling thunder. Coming out of you it's like a trumpet blast, or like a thunder roar.

The Thessalonians weren't subtle either, they learned well from Paul. They weren't hesitant. They weren't apologetic for their message. They didn't try to sugarcoat the gospel. They just blared it out. They just trumpeted it out. The perfect tense in that verb indicates a continual trumpeting, continual trumpeting, continual trumpeting. From the very beginning this is going on.

Now remember, this church is a few months old, that's all. And already everybody knows about them. It sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place, everywhere. Well, people were going east on the Egnatian Highway to the Orient, they were going west on the Egnatian Highway, they were going north coming up out of the Aegean Sea and bringing their boat in at port there at Thessalonica and going up into Europe through there, they were taking ships out of there going all over the Mediterranean. That was a focal point, that was the hub and the spokes were going everywhere...and everywhere people went they were taking the message of this little church. It wasn't their size, it was their conviction...boldness. So it pictures a constant sound, just increasing echoing into a wider and wider area. The redeemed of the Lord are to say so and they were doing it. They had a strategic location to evangelize and it was working...just little tiny baby church and already everybody knows about their faith.

He says in verse 8, "Your faith toward God has gone forth so that we have no need to say anything." We don't even need to tell anybody what's going on there, everybody already knows. Your noble deeds, the sound of your gospel proclamation is so loud that the Apostle says, "I don't need to tell anybody about you."

I'll give you a little secret. Even though he didn't need to, he did. Couldn't resist it. Second Thessalonians 1:4, "We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith." He says...I don't need to say anything, but I can't help it. I speak proudly about you. I'm so proud of what God is doing in you, I just can't resist it.

You remember reading in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 about the Macedonians? And you remember in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 Paul writing to the Corinthians wants to tell the Corinthians how to give, so he says, "Let me tell you how somebody else gave. Let me tell you about the churches of Macedonia. They were in a great ordeal of affliction but their joy was abundant and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality, for I testified that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord."

Listen, this was a remarkable church. They were poor. When you're under persecution, you're poor. Maybe they couldn't get jobs. Maybe people wouldn't sell things to them. They were in deep poverty. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Let me tell you how to learn to give, look at those Macedonians under tremendous persecution, very, very poor and yet they gave liberally and they gave sacrificially." They are the model for spiritual giving and stewardship. And, of course, later in that chapter he says they first gave...what?...themselves. This is a remarkable church, remarkable church. So remarkable that in a few months everybody knows about them...everybody. Paul doesn't have to say a word because their faith, their generosity, their love, their sacrifice, their dedication, their devotion and their gospel preaching has gone everywhere.

Verse 9, "For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you." Stop at that point. What do you mean "they themselves"? People everywhere. He says people everywhere are telling us about you, they're telling us what kind of a reception we had with you. They'd come up to Paul and say, "Boy, Paul, we hear that...man, something really happened in Thessalonica." That's right, it did. He says, "Everywhere I go instead of me telling them about you, everybody is telling me about you." They were reporting what kind of a reception we had with you, how you responded to our preaching. And so he says election is evidenced by proclamation.

You know how you can tell the elect? They have a desire to proclaim Christ, they have a desire to talk about the gospel. He says, "I know you're elect because the Word sounds out from you." Somebody who says they're a Christian and have no interest in talking about any...talking to anyone about Christ, you have reason to question them. Election is evidenced by proclamation. Is it any wonder that he knows they're elect? They have a faith that works, a love that labors, a hope that perseveres, experienced a preaching that was powerful, they have a life that is new, a joy that is transcendent, a behavior that is exemplary, and then they have a witness that is strong. Not much doubt.

Two more identifying marks. Number nine, they had an allegiance that submits...they had an allegiance that submits. Back to verse 9. He says, "I know you're elect, beloved of God, I know because you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." An allegiance that submits...I love that. One of the evidences of new life is that you submit to the new Master. How you turned to God, epistrepheo, it's a verb used in the book of Acts and a number of places for conversion...Acts 14:15; Acts 20:18; and 20:20; Acts 28:27. It's used in James 5, I think it's about verses 19 and 20. And he is saying, "You turned to God, you turned around to go the other direction. You turned from idols to God." That's a new allegiance. That's a brand new allegiance.

Second Corinthians 3:16, listen to this, "Whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." He's saying you've turned to the Lord. That's another way to describe salvation. You've been converted. That's what that word is used to mean in Acts. It involves repentance, a turning from sin from idolatry, from following idols to a new Master. And that's very clear because he says this, "You turned to God from idols." For what reason, to believe in a new god? No, "To serve a living and true God."

Why does he say that? Because idols are false and dead. So you turned from the false dead idols to serve the true living God. That's transformation of allegiance. And that's involving repentance which is not just changing your mind about who God is or who Christ is, but it's changing your allegiance.

The word "serve" is very important. It's not a liturgical word, it's a word of slavery, douleuo, it means a bondsman, the lowest level of slavery. You turned from being a slave to a false dead idol and you

became a slave of the living and true God. Beloved, it's so simple to say to you this, nobody ever comes to Jesus Christ who does not immediately engage himself as a slave of God...whose basic reason for living is obedience and submission. By the way, this tells us there were not only Jews in this church but many Gentiles. Paul had no doubt stayed long after those...a few weeks after those three Sabbaths to reach Gentiles.

So he says..."Here is a real and total change in which your lives are now in a new submission, a new allegiance, not to dead false idols, but to the living and true God. And you are serving Him, you are His slave." John Calvin wrote, "Only the man who has learned to put himself wholly in subjection to God is truly converted to Him," end quote. That's true. It's true. Only the man who has learned to put himself wholly in subjection to God is truly converted to Him.

We don't understand the full implications of that but that's what it is. When God converts a man, He changes the entire person, not just the emotions. He does change the emotions so that you regret your former life, but He also changes the will so that you desire to serve God. Leon Morris writes, "The act of conversion involves a change of direction of the will. There is a decisive happening, a reorientation of the whole of life. This is so in every age. The most characteristic thing about salvation," he says, "is not the continuity of life but the decisive break." He's right. You turn from idols to God, from the dead to the living, from the false to the true to stop serving and start serving the true God. Let's add another little word to our list, subjugation That's a characteristic of the elect.

And a last point, and a beautiful one at that and a fine one to finish. Verse 10, "You are elect because you are committed to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." The tenth mark of the elect, awaiting for Christ...awaiting for Christ.

Wherever there is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is the longing to see Him. The disciples standing on the hillside in Acts 11 watching Jesus go into heaven are heartsick. And an angel says to them, "This same Jesus who was taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you've seen Him go." That is the hope of every Christian's heart. And the Second Coming becomes a major theme in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, as we shall see.

But, you see, the elect are known because they're waiting for Christ. They're waiting for Christ. They're waiting for the Son of God to come back from heaven. And who is that Son of God? He says, "The one whom God raised from the dead whose name is Jesus." Boy, if there's any question about whether Jesus is the Son of God or not, that ought to eliminate it. The elect are known by the fact that they are waiting for Jesus.

You say, "What is the character of this waiting?" Look at 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 8, just briefly listen to what Paul says, "In the future there's laid up for me the crown of righteousness," that means

the crown which is righteousness, eternal righteousness, "which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day." Listen to this, "Not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Listen to me. Heaven and eternal righteousness is for those who love the return of Jesus. In other words, that's the definition of a Christian, we're looking for Christ to come back. If you're not looking for Jesus, then you're not squaring up with what marks the elect. We believe He's coming and we hope in that coming.

Listen to Titus chapter 2 verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared and it appeared bringing salvation to all men." What did that salvation do? "Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

Listen, when you became a Christian, salvation taught you to look for Christ. It taught you to look for the blessed hope. We're looking for God's Son. And who is God's Son? The One He raised from the dead. And who did He raise from the dead? Jesus and He is coming...and I love this...to deliver us from the wrath to come. What does he mean by that? Well what's he talking about here? The wrath is orge, God's settled wrath, His fury, His eternal wrath against sin, His eternal judgment I believe is what he has in mind here. He is speaking of salvation in this whole context and he is saying it is the resurrected Jesus, the One who delivers us from an eternal hell who is coming back and He is the One that we are waiting for.

Some say this refers to the Rapture before the Great Tribulation. I don't think so. I don't think this is eschatological wrath, I think this is eternal wrath. It's the saving Christ, the risen Christ who is our Savior who is coming back and we look for Him. So our last word of the ten, expectation. The elect are marked by expectation.

Can I review it real quickly for you and then we'll close?

How do you know the true Christians? Listen very carefully now to what I say or you might be confused. You can tell a true Christian, he has a faith that works, a love that labors, a hope that perseveres, has been under a preaching that is powerful, has a life that is new, has a joy that is transcendent, a behavior that is exemplary, a witness that is strong and an allegiance that submits, and a waiting for Jesus. Now listen carefully. If these don't mark you, then I can't tell if you're a Christian and very likely, neither can you.

You say, "Is it possible that a Christian could lose touch with the reality of these things in his life?" Yes. That's why in 2 Peter 1 Peter says, "You need to make sure that you are confident." You need to make your calling and election sure. Not to God, He's already sure, He knows who's elect. But to

yourself and you do that by demonstrating the evidences. Listen, sin...sin can stop the product in your life. Sin can tear at the affection you have for Christ. Sin can steal your hope. Sin can make your life look old. Sin can rob you of your joy. Sin can make your behavior something that is the opposite of exemplary. Sin can destroy your witness. Sin can make you disobedient and devastate your allegiance to Christ. Sin can make you not even want to see Jesus.

The point is this. Unless these things are evident in your life, I don't know if you're a Christian and neither will you. Paul did know in the case of the Thessalonians because these things were manifest. Nothing is more important than that you know your spiritual condition. Why? Because the great accuser of the brethren, the great deceiver, Satan himself, wants to capture you in the allusion that your condition is right when it isn't. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, as we have considered this great chapter this morning, we pray that You might give us clarity in mind in order to apply it to our lives. As Peter said, "Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you for as long as you practice these things you'll never stumble." As he reminded us, the one who lacks these kinds of spiritual evidences is blind and short sighted and forgets that he's purged from his sins. Father, we have some people in our congregation this morning I know who have never embraced Jesus Christ, who are not brethren beloved because they've never come to faith in Christ. May this be that day for them. There are Christians who are fighting in their own minds doubt because there's sin in their life that is militating against all these evidences. I pray that in confession and cleansing they might come to the fullness of assurance which is Your gift to an obedient believer. We thank You for the Thessalonians and what a testimony they are to us. May we be like them. May our church bring joy to Your heart even as that one must have. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gtycanada.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2012 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).