

# Chosen by God

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

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## What is significant about the book of 1 Thessalonians?

It was the first of Paul's epistles which have been preserved for us.

- The Thessalonian Church was a congregation of new believers... it is thus significant that Paul revealed the rapture to them (this is not a doctrine that should be hidden from anyone much less new believers).
- I saw a meme that said if Paul was on earth today, the church in America would get a letter.

## 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5 – (NIV)

*Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. <sup>2</sup>We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.*

## v1 – Who was with Paul when he wrote this letter?

*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy:* Paul was an amazing man and apostle of God, but he usually did not work all by himself. Whenever he could, Paul worked with a team.

## What do we know about Silvanus (also known as *Silas*)?

He was a long and experienced companion of Paul. He traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey and was imprisoned and set free with Paul in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:19-30). When Paul first came to Thessalonica, Silas came with him (Acts 17:1-9). Therefore, the Thessalonians knew **Silvanus** well.

## What do we know about Timothy?

Timothy was a resident of Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia (Acts 16:1-3). He was the son of a Greek father (Acts 16:1) and a Jewish mother named Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). From his youth learned the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Timothy was a trusted companion and associate of Paul, and he accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys. Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians on a previous occasion (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

## What was Paul's association with the church of the Thessalonians?

Paul himself founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). He was only in the city a short time because he was forced out by enemies of the Gospel. Yet **the church of the Thessalonians** continued alive and active.

## What do we know about Thessalonica?

On Paul's second missionary journey, he was imprisoned in Philippi and then miraculously freed from jail — only to be kicked out of the city. Then he came to Thessalonica, the prosperous capital of the province of Macedonia (northern Greece), located on the famous Egnatian Way.

- After only three weekends of prosperous ministry (Acts 17:2), he had to flee from an angry mob. He moved on to Berea — again enjoying several weeks of ministry, but soon driven out by the same Thessalonian mob.
- His next stop was Athens where he preached a good sermon but had mixed results. By the time he came to Corinth, he was *in weakness, in fear and in much trembling* (1 Corinthians 2:3). At this point of the second missionary journey, it seemed that Paul was a very discouraged missionary.

## What prompted Paul's letter to the Thessalonians?

While in Corinth, it is likely that Paul was greatly concerned about the churches he had just founded, and he wondered about their state. While at Corinth, Silas and Timothy came to him from Thessalonica with great news: the church there was strong. Paul became so excited that he dashed off this letter to the Thessalonians, probably his first letter to any church. He wrote it just a few months after he had first established the church in Thessalonica.

- After writing and sending this letter, Paul enjoyed a sustained and fruitful ministry in Corinth — and eventually returned to the Thessalonians.

### How did Paul greet the Thessalonians?

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:* Paul brought this customary greeting to the Thessalonian Christians, hailing them in the **grace** and **peace** of God the Father.

- Grace fundamentally means ‘that which causes joy’
- It comes to mean ‘favor,’ ‘kindness,’ and especially God’s kindness to man in providing for his needs.

### How does Paul’s greeting reinforce the deity of Christ?

*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:* Paul’s construction, unites the two under one preposition in (*en*), places the two names side by side on a basis of equality.

### v2 – To whom did Paul credit the belief of the Thessalonians?

*We give thanks to God always for you all:* When Paul thought of the Christians in Thessalonica, his heart filled with gratitude. Paul started the church there in less-than-ideal circumstances, being run out of town after only three weekends with them (Acts 17:1-10). Yet the church was strong and full of life. Paul knew that this work was beyond him and his abilities and that it was the work of God.

### What does it tell us that Paul made mention of the Thessalonians in his prayers?

When Paul prayed for people and churches, it wasn’t necessarily a long time of intercession. He often simply made **mention** of a church or a person in prayer (Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, Philemon 1:4).

- And not Paul alone, the plural implies that all three missionaries prayed together.

### v3 – What made Paul thankful of the Thessalonians?

There were things about the Christians in Thessalonica that Paul simply could not forget...

- Paul’s gratitude didn’t come because all the Christians in Thessalonica thought so highly of him. Later, Paul used a whole chapter defending himself and his ministry against slander and false accusations.
- Paul’s gratitude didn’t come because the Thessalonian Christians were morally impeccable. Later in the letter, Paul strongly warned them against the failings in regard to sexual impurity.
- Paul’s gratitude didn’t come because the Thessalonian Christians were completely accurate in all their doctrine. He had to correct some of their wrong ideas in that area also.

Despite the problems, Paul was so grateful to God for the Thessalonians because there was an undeniable work of the Holy Spirit and a marvelous change in their lives.

- The three great Christian virtues were evident among them: **faith, love, and hope**.

### Why is faith, love, and hope so important?

Here for the first time, chronologically, in Paul’s writings we have this famous triad: *faith, love, hope*. But Paul’s stress is not on these virtues alone, but rather upon what they produce.

- Therefore, their **faith** produced **work** — as is the nature of true faith.
- Their **love** produced **labor**. There are two different ancient Greek words for work: *ergon* and *kopos*. *Ergon* “may be pleasant and stimulating,” but *kopos* “implies toil that is strenuous and sweat-producing.”
- Their **hope** produced **patience**, which is the long-suffering *endurance* needed to not only survive hard times, but to triumph through them.

### v4 – What did Paul connect with the reminder of God’s love?

*Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God:* Paul reminded them that God *loved* them (**beloved**) and that He *chose* them (**election**). The two go together. When we *love* someone, we naturally *choose* them.

### What is the significance of the phrase *beloved by God*?

It was a phrase which the Jews applied only to supremely great men like Moses and Solomon, and to the nation of Israel itself. Now the greatest privilege of the greatest men of God’s chosen people has been extended to the humblest of the Gentiles.

### Why was Paul so confident in knowing their election by God?

The following verses will explain four evidences of election:

- The Word of God coming home with power (*our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power*).
- The reception of God’s Word with much assurance (*and in much assurance*).
- The desire to be like Jesus (*you became followers of us and of the Lord*).
- The existence of spiritual joy in spiritual service (*in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit*).

### What does being chosen by God have to say about eternal security?

Our salvation is not a function of anything we do, it is based on what God has done for us. If our salvation is based on what God has done, then we are secure because there is nothing we can do to undo our salvation...Once saved, always saved is true biblical doctrine.

### **What is the doctrine of election?**

The biblical doctrine of election teaches that God chooses to save some, and, if He does not choose everyone, then there are some who are passed over.

- Those whom He has chosen to save are referred to as “the elect” (see, e.g., Mark 13:20).

The Bible teaches that God chooses people based on His own purposes and His desire to show grace to undeserving sinners.

Ephesians 1:4–6 – *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

He chose in accordance with His pleasure and will, so that He would be glorified. God’s election has nothing to do with what the elect would or would not do.

### **How do we know God did not choose everyone?**

If He had, then everyone would come to faith in Christ. He chose some, and He left others to their own desires.

- Left to ourselves, all of us would continue in our rebellion and reject Christ.

God chose to pursue some, convict them of their need, and lead them to faith. It is because of God’s choice that anyone comes to faith in Christ.

John 6:44 – *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day*

### **Why wouldn’t a loving God choose everyone?**

We are in no place to judge God! It is not as though some are desperately crying out to Him for salvation and He rejects them because He has not chosen them.

- Those whom God does not choose continue doing exactly what they want—they rebel against God and try to stay as far away from Him as possible.
- He simply allows them to continue on the path they have freely and willfully chosen.

He has, however, chosen to intervene in the lives of some and win them over.

- He does this so that He might show His love and kindness to people who are undeserving.

### **Does God “choose” based on the choices that He knows that the elect will make?**

But that would make people the ultimate choosers, with God simply following our choice. Biblically, it is the other way around.

- God chooses some based on His own purposes, and then, in response to His work in their lives, they choose Him.

His choice is first and foundational. Without God’s election, no one would ever turn to Him.

### **Why do Christians recoil at the doctrine of election?**

Some object to the doctrine of election on the grounds that it stifles missionary and evangelistic activity.

- This objection overlooks the truth that hearing and believing the gospel is the means that God uses to save those He has chosen to save.
- Paul endured persecution so that the elect will be saved, because the elect cannot be saved without hearing and believing the gospel (2 Timothy 2:10).
- The doctrine of election frees us to share the gospel without pressure or fear of failure. When we share the gospel clearly, we have been obedient, and that is a success. The results are left to God.

### **How have you experienced God’s election in your own life?**

Most believers will admit that God was at work in their lives, drawing them to Himself long before they were even aware of it.

- They will recognize that, if He had not intervened, they would have continued in unbelief.

The hand of God, working in big ways and little ways, becomes more evident in hindsight.

### **What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- The Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope are important, we should be growing in them.
- Being chosen by God means we have eternal security.