



Expressions of Thanksgiving (part 2)

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5d

- 1.. How Paul Expresses His Thankfulness
2. When Paul Expresses His Thankfulness
3. Why Paul Expresses His Thankfulness
 - a. Because of how our gospel came

As we did last week, we are going to continue on in our exposition of Paul's epistle to the church of the Thessalonians. So, I invite you to open your Bibles once again to First Thessalonians, chapter 1. Let me remind you that 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 is a chapter which is all about thanksgiving.

The three words at the beginning of verse 2, "We give thanks" really govern the entire chapter. Paul is thankful to God for the work that he has done in the life of the believers in Thessalonica. Though they were with Paul for only a few weeks and though they had very little opportunity to learn much of God's word, God was merciful to save them and to keep them. They were Jesus' sheep, about whom Jesus spoke, ...

John 10:27-29

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given [them] to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch [them] out of the Father's hand.

The Thessalonians were Jesus' sheep. They were not goats; they were sheep. They were not tares; they were wheat. They heard Jesus' voice, and they followed Jesus at the hearing of His voice. Jesus gave them eternal life, and nobody is able to snatch them out of His hand. And Paul was thankful to the Lord for this fact. They were true believers.

Paul expresses his thankfulness for the authentic faith of the Thessalonians in 3 ways. We looked at this last week. And, we noted that each of these expressions of thankfulness were derived from the 3 participles that modify the main verb, "We give thanks."

The three participles are "making mention" (verse 2), "bearing in mind" (verse 3), and "knowing" (verse 4). And last week, we had the opportunity to look at the first 2 participles. First, we saw, ...

1. How Paul Expresses His Thankfulness

"Making mention of you in our prayers" (verse 2). How did Paul express his thankfulness? By praying for them.

Second, we saw, ...

2. When Paul Expresses His Thankfulness

"Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father" (verse 3). When did Paul express his thankfulness? Constantly.

And tonight, we will look at ...

3. Why Paul Expresses His Thankfulness

"Knowing brethren beloved by God, [His] choice of you" (verse 4). Why did Paul express his thankfulness? They were chosen by God. In other words, Paul is rejoicing, because he knows that their salvation was a work of God. He knows that God softened their hearts to hear and believe the gospel; he knows that they were in the hand of the Father and nobody could take them away from the Father; he knows that God has bestowed his unmerited grace upon them.

Notice what gives Paul here great thankfulness to God. It wasn't that "They chose God." See, Paul had already seen them "choose God." When he was in Thessalonica, he saw them "turn from their idols to serve a living and true God." He saw how "some of [the Jews] were persuaded ... along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women"(Acts 17:4). He saw how many people had "chosen God." And yet, this is not what gave Paul great thankfulness.

We saw this evidenced in chapter 3, when he said that he could "endure it no longer." He was not comforted by their choice of God, because he wanted to see if their choice had continued to stand! Because Paul knew that if somebody "chose God," they could easily, at another time, "chose idols." Their choices aren't secure. But notice what does give Paul great thankfulness. It was that "God chose them!"

Often times, this concept is referred to as "election" and rightly so. If you look at verse 4 (if you have a NASB), you will see in the text that the word, "His" is in italics. Thus, it is best read, "knowing brethren, beloved by God, choice of you." But that is difficult to say. It is better to

translate it, "knowing brethren, beloved by God, [and as the Greek text says it,] "of you." or rather, "your election." The KJV and NKJV both say "your election of God."

"Knowing brethren, beloved by God, your election." This concept of God's election is saturated throughout the whole Bible.

When Moses was speaking to the Israelites, he said this:

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

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. The LORD did not set His love on you nor *choose* you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 14:2

You are a holy people to the LORD your God; and the LORD has *chosen* you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

When people rejected Jesus, He praised the Father, saying, ...

Matthew 11:25-27

I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal [Him].

And Paul spoke about how we are "chosen in Him, before the foundation of the world ... and predestined to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ."

The concept of election is behind Paul's thoughts when he described our salvation as nothing that we have done, but everything that God has done. This shows up in passages like Titus, chapter 3, ...

Titus 3:3-5

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and [His] love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

It also shows up when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, ...

Eph. 2:1, 4-5

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ... Among them 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 wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

Paul's mention of election is pastoral. Notice that Paul wasn't thankful for foreknown faith. How many of you have heard things explained like this: "God looked down the corridors of time and saw who would believe, and chose them."? This is foreknown faith. However, foreknown faith is no reason to rejoice, because foreknown faith may just as easily turn into foreknown apostasy. But it is the election of God, before the foundation of the world, so that salvation has nothing to do with us, but everything to do with God (i.e. 1 Cor. 1:30 - "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus"), which is great cause for rejoicing.

You say, "how so?" Turn in your Bibles to John, chapter 10, beginning at verse 22.

John 10:22

At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem;

"The feast of Dedication" is another name for "Hanukkah." "Hanukkah" in Hebrew, means "dedication." This holiday celebrates the "rededication" of the temple to the Lord after it was desecrated by the Gentiles under the leadership of Antichus Epiphanes (in the 2nd century before Christ).

John 10:23

it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.

Then as now, Hanukkah has always been celebrated in the winter. (on the 25th of the Jewish month, Kislev). Jesus was in the temple, as was his custom on these high holy days. And a debate arose, ...

John 10:24-25

The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me."

The Jews were anxious to know if Jesus was the Christ or not. They said, "if You are the Christ, tell us plainly!" If they were a child today, they would have said, "pretty please, with sugar on top!" Jesus said, "I did tell you and you do not believe." I want you to pay particular attention to the next verse, in which Jesus tells us plainly why they do not believe.

John 10:26

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep.

Listen to what Jesus said. "You do not believe, because you are not of My sheep." Jesus does not say, "you are not My sheep, because you do not believe." See, being one of Jesus' sheep is not dependent upon believing. It is exactly the opposite: Believing is dependent upon being a sheep. Is that not what Jesus says? "You do not believe, because you are not of My sheep."

In other words, belief does not grant entrance *into* God's family. However, belief demonstrates that one is *in* God's family. This is what Jesus says in the next verse, and this is what gives Paul great comfort.

John 10:27

My sheep [i.e. those sheep who have been chosen, beforehand by God] hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

That is, "Those who are Jesus' sheep hear His voice and follow Him." They recognize His voice; they believe His voice; they follow His voice. And why? Because they are His sheep. An example of this would be tonight when we were praying. I heard Hanna's voice during prayer. Though Hanna was not visible to me, I knew that it was her. I know her voice. Jesus continues, ...

John 10:28

and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.

That is, they are given eternal life. They are guaranteed that they will never perish. The hand of Jesus, who saved them, is strong enough to keep them saved. Then Jesus affirms that what is true of Himself, is true of the Father also. And he finally affirms His unity with the Father (because it is the same hand), ...

John 10:29-30

My Father, who has given [them] to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch [them] out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

This here demonstrates the perseverance of the saints. Because a true saint is in the hand of God, and nobody can take that saint away from the hand of God. But notice that the reason a saint perseveres is because it is God who initiates and saves. The God who elects the saints is the God who preserves the saints.

We sung Romans 8:38-39 this evening, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is a great song of perseverance. But, how can we be sure that this is true? The answer lies in this truth of election, a mere 10 verses earlier: "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justifies these He also glorified" (Rom 8:29-30). That which God starts, he brings to completion.

And this is what Paul is thankful to God for in the church of the Thessalonians. Let's turn back to 1 Thessalonians.

Now, when Paul says that he "knows" their election, what does he mean? How does somebody "know" that they are elect? Spurgeon spoke once about lifting the shirts of people and see if they have a big "E" on their back. The answer to this question lies right here in this passage. In the Greek language, there are two words for "knowing": intimate knowledge by experience and knowledge gained by observation. In this context, Paul uses the 2nd word, meaning knowledge by observation, to indicate that he knows of their election by what he has observed in them.

So, how do you know who is elect by God? We know because of what we see in them. When we see people respond to the scriptures in obedience; when we see people genuinely love others; when we see people trusting in the Lord for all things, we know that God is working within them. That is what Paul saw. He saw their work of faith (work produced by faith). He saw their labor of love (labor produced by love). He saw their steadfastness of hope (steadfastness produced by hope). Paul saw (he knew by observation) what their faith, love and hope

produced and was assured of the presence of their faith, love, and hope.

Not only do verses 2 and 3 support his "knowing, brethren, beloved of God, His choice of you" but especially does verse 5. If you notice, verse 5 begins with the word, "for," which may also be translated, "because." We know your election because of the things listed in verse 5. Verse 5 describes how the gospel came to the Thessalonians. And as we go through these characteristics, we see that in each of them, Paul is communicating to the Thessalonians that as the gospel came, God was fully at work. And God working among the Thessalonians gives comfort to believing in God's choosing the Thessalonians.

While verses 2 and 3 focus on the present activity of the Thessalonians, verse 5 focuses on the past preaching of the apostle as he came to them. Look at what Paul says: "For our gospel did not come to you in word only." Though this is not his focus, it is a fact nonetheless that the gospel came.

1. The gospel came in word.

What Paul means here is that the gospel came through the avenue of one person speaking to another person, using words. When Paul came to the Thessalonians, the gospel came "in word" as he explained to them the work of Christ on the cross, the plan of salvation (repentance and forgiveness), and the return of Christ as judge.

Particularly here, one of the reasons that Paul knew that they were elect, was because they received the words he spoke, not as Paul's words, but as the very words of God. Look in 2:13 - "And 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."

But Paul said that it came in other ways.

2. It came in power.

There is debate and discussion as to what exactly this means.

Some of our charismatic friends would have us to believe that this message came with "performing of miracles and healings." It might mean that. We have no evidence of such miracles and healings of having taken place among the Thessalonians.

But it probably means that when Paul preached, his preaching was such that it wasn't a cold lecture, which had no effect on people (like many lectures in school). It was probably that there was an effect produced. Rom. 1:16 says - "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

I think about when preachers have preached during the great revivals of the last several hundred years. The testimony has always been that the word had a tremendous effect on people. It has been the preached word, which was used of God to convict people of sin and turn them to God. This is something that can only be attributed to the work and power of God.

So, this week, I pulled out a biography I have read of a great preacher in the 1800's. His name was Asahel Nettleton. In the year, 1821, he visited Farmington, Connecticut and preached there for a few months. Here is how one eye witness describes the events:

Of all the revivals that I have ever witnessed, none have so deeply interested my heart -- none appear so strikingly to manifest the power of God, or the excellence of the Christian character, as that with which Farmington has been blessed. ... The blessed effect of such a work I have now witnessed; and it is beyond anything I could have had faith to pray for. The change in the moral aspect of things is astonishing. Many who have been very far from God and righteousness, have, as we humbly hope, recently been brought nigh by the blood of His Son. Some, whose moral condition once appeared hopeless, are now in their right minds at the feet of Jesus. Many of the professed devotees of Mammon have recently parted with all for Christ. A large class of this community have been eagerly engaged in the pursuit of riches; and their clashing interests, combined with these feelings of selfishness and pride which avarice fosters, have produced, as might be expected, quarrels among neighbors, and much hostility of feeling. The quelling of this hostile spirit was among the first visible effects of the Spirit of God. Of many who have formerly been not even on speaking terms, it may now be said, as it was of the early disciples: "See how these Christians love one another!" [\[1\]](#)

Does this not match how Paul described their conversion?

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, [that is] Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

A few pages later (in this biography of Asahel Nettleton), a pastor wrote to Mr. Nettleton describing the effects of his preaching in South Wilbraham, Massachusetts. He wrote:

"I am prompted by my own feelings, and by a knowledge of your solicitude to communicate to the public such information as relates to the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, to announce the fact, that God is in the midst of us displaying the wonders of His grace. About eight weeks since, it began to be manifest

that the Spirit was moving upon the hearts of God's people, and that sinners were no longer indifferent to the momentous question of the trembling jailer. Soon the voice of distress was heard; and soon, too, it was mingled with that of rejoicing and praise. The work as been still and powerful. Between ninety and a hundred are rejoicing in hope." [\[2\]](#)

This is what I think happened in Thessalonica! It was a revival! It was in the midst of experiencing the working of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of the people to see their sin and cry to God for mercy. As DML-J says, "What we read about the church in the New Testament is an account of revival. The New Testament church was full of the power of the Spirit. When you read the history of revivals, are you not reminded at once of the book of the Acts of the Apostles? The church always looks like the church in the New Testament when she is in the midst of revival."

Not only did the work come in word and in power, but it also came ...

3. In the Holy Spirit.

Now, I think that we have touched a little bit upon the relationship of the Spirit of God and the power that comes when the gospel is preached to needy sinners. Paul often links these two concepts together. You remember in his preaching to Corinth:

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

and My preaching and my message were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

He also linked them together in Romans 15:19, where he spoke about "the power of signs and wonders combined with the power of the Spirit." I believe that the point here is that "God performed the work that we cannot do." That is what Paul prayed, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13), because it was God who could allow them to live.

And that is what caused Paul to rejoice so greatly. He sensed the presence of the Spirit of God among his preaching. He saw the work of the Spirit of God in turning the Thessalonians from idols to God. He saw how their behavior "upset the world" (or as the KJV puts it - their behavior "turned the world upside down").

DML-J says, "What was it that turned the ancient world upside down? Was it just theological teaching? Was it enunciation of correct doctrine? Over and above that there was this mighty 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power' How did those people turn the world upside down? The answer is that in the book of Acts we have an account of a great revival, of the Spirit outpoured." The Thessalonians had experienced great revival and God had changed them mightily. God had changed them from idol worshippers to true Christians. They held to the true power of godliness, not merely a form.

But Paul says that the gospel also came

4. With full conviction.

This word is translated differently in different versions of the Bible. NAS says, "full conviction". The NIV uses, "deep conviction". Both the KJV and the NKJV translate it as, "much assurance" This word in general means, "assurance, confidence." In the NAS, it is everywhere else translated, "full assurance." "Full assurance of hope" (Heb. 6:11), "Full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22), "Full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2).

This can mean one of two things. Either it was the assurance of Paul in his preaching or it was the assurance of the Thessalonians in the message. In this passage, it surely means that the Thessalonians were fully persuaded of Paul's message. The message cut deep into their souls. So persuaded were they that they would turn to God from idols (1:9); they would endure the hostility and tribulation of the non-Believers in Thessalonica (1:6; 2:14); they would always think highly of Paul, despite his little time among them (3:6).

And this persuasion can only come from God. "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). You remember that "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14).

The dead in Christ do not believe, unless God makes them alive. That is what Paul is saying. I know that you are chosen by God and are one of his elect, because He performed His work in you by how you received the word. It came "in power and in the Holy Spirit" and it came "with much assurance/conviction/confidence." This is the work that God does in the heart. He confirms the word and gives us confidence in that word. He empowers us by His Spirit to change our behavior. He gives us a love for and a confidence in the word of God.

Notice in 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul is speaking about those who will perish, "because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." That is God's work!

So, not only did the gospel come in word, in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction, it also came ...

5. With example.

Paul furthermore added his life to how the gospel came. And in doing so, he added one more characteristic of how the gospel came: "just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

The KJV and NKJV miss the point of the verb here, when they translate this "as you know what kind of men we were." This is a passive verb, which seems to indicate that God was working on them to "make them live this way." Perhaps it is best translated, "just as you know what kind of men we were made to be among you for your sake." At any rate, Paul's point here is to tell them that during his stay in Thessalonica, he was supernaturally empowered to live blameless lives while among them.

And we will get more into his life among them in chapter 2, where Paul said that he was "gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children" (2:7) and he was "exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children." The Thessalonians knew what sort of men they were. They saw the power of God working in their life. There was no getting around this.

Paul first appeals to the fact that the Thessalonians knew of Paul's conduct while he was with them. This is something that he did quite often, it almost seems as if he is defending himself by calling his example into mind for the Thessalonians ...

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

For you yourselves know brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-11

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, [how] working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and [so is] God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we [were] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father [would] his own children,

And this is important. It is important for you to know of the life that a pastor or evangelist leads. Al Martin once gave a principle that I think is very good: "There is generally a direct relationship between the quality of life lived by the minister and the power and effectiveness of the truth coming through that life."

1 Thessalonians 1:5 tells us that the coming of the gospel was somewhat related to the example of those bringing the gospel. We shall see next week that the Thessalonians responded to the gospel by imitating how Paul and Silas conducted themselves during their time in Thessalonica. 1 Thessalonians 1:6: "You became imitators of us and of the Lord."

This is why the Bible sets up standards for the life that a deacon or an elder must meet (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). I met this past week with somebody at work last week and talked about our church. The thing that will eventually give our church credibility will be in how this man sees my life. If he sees in my life a life that hasn't been transformed by the power of God, I will have no credibility in his eyes. This is so true in ministry and in life as well. I think especially of opportunities that I have had to disciple others. I know that they will learn as much from my life as they will from the biblical content that I teach them (or have taught them). How important it is that you live and model a consistent life before others.

Parents, this is especially true of you. Your kids will remember your example far more than they will remember your words. Alexander on Family Worship "Where the head of a family is lukewarm or worldly, he will send the chill through the whole house (p 33). ... Where the head of the family is a man of faith, of affection, and of zeal, consecrating all his works and life to Christ, it is very rare to find all his household otherwise-minded. Family-worship has a direct and manifest tendency to make religion a matter of every-day interest" (p 38).

So, we will close, remembering that Paul is thankful to God for the election of the Thessalonians, because he saw how they lived (verses 2-3) and how they received the gospel (verses 4-5).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 20, 2000 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Asahel Nettleton: Life and Labors, pp. 152-3

[2] Asahel Nettleton: Life and Labors, pp. ???