

I Thessalonians 1:1–5

I Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUL, Silvanus, and Timothy came to the Thessalonians with one voice, declaring to them the Word of the Lord. *A threefold cord is not quickly broken,*¹ and as such, three believing servants of God were a unified voice confirming the truth that would be revealed. To establish something as the truth, two or three witnesses are required. *This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established* (II Cor 13:1). Multiple witnesses were essential when elders were accused,² when men ignored reproof from a brother,³ or when sinners in the Old Testament set aside the law of Moses.⁴ This is also true when a new revelation from the Lord is brought to men. Though men may be hesitant to believe one witness, two to three provide greater confirmation of the truth.

Understanding this, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy's joint letter to the Thessalo-

nians gave ample evidence that the word brought to them was from the Lord. That which Paul had preached to the Corinthians of being of one mind, speaking the same thing with no division,⁵ was exactly the same harmony that existed between Silvanus, Timothy, and Paul himself. Ultimately unity is necessary for outreach. If it is not held by those who hold forth the Word, it will not be easily embraced by those who hear it.

Unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit prompted Paul to pen a letter to the Thessalonians because of Whom they were *in*. Their faith resided *in* God as their Father and *in* His Son, Jesus Christ, as their Lord. They were not like so many Jews who were merely *in* religion or so many Gentiles who loved their state of being *in* the world. Rather, for the church at Thessalonica, their place of refuge, comfort, and delight was *in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*. This teaches us that though true Christians live in this world, they are not of it, for none can truly walk with the Father and be content with a carnal and sinful world so separate from and different than Him.⁶

1 Eccl. 4:12 *And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

2 I Tim. 5:19 *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*

3 Matt. 18:15–16 *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.* ¹⁶*But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

4 Deut. 17:6 *At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.*

5 I Cor. 1:10 *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

6 I John 2:15 *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

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(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, I Thess. 1:1) *In God*.—Other Thessalonians were “in the world,” “in darkness,” “in their sins.” The distinctive mark of these was that they were re-united to the Father of all men; and more, re-united in Christ.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, I Thess. 1:1) *Which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ*—Who are united to the true God and to the Redeemer; or who sustain an intimate relation to the Father and the Lord Jesus. This is strong language, denoting, that they were a true church...

Both *God the Father* and the *Lord Jesus Christ* are mentioned because men cannot truly possess one without also possessing the other, as God is seen and made visible through the Son, and no man can see the Father except through the one sent to declare Him.⁷ Thus, it is impossible by biblical standards to hold one member of the Trinity and not hold the others. For a man to be truly saved, all three members of the godhead must be embraced. The Great Commission demands that men are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because they are divinely bound, and to truly believe in one will lead to belief in the other two.⁸

(*Matthew Poole's Commentary*, I Thess. 1:1) *And in the Lord Jesus Christ*; these two are put together, because there is no access to God the Father, no true worship of him, no union or communion with him, and so no being in him, but through Jesus Christ. And by both they might see the blessed state they were now brought to by the gospel; being before strangers to God the Father and Jesus Christ, but now in them.

The degree in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are bound together is seen throughout Scripture. Hence, if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not a man's Lord, then God will not be his Father. And it is through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that heavenly sonship is both gained and confirmed. *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father* (Gal. 4:6). Likewise, men will properly and rightly call God *Abba, Father*, only when Christ sends the Spirit into their hearts. This teaches us that for true salvation, the Holy Spirit must be received and Christ's lordship accepted. *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost* (I Cor. 12:3). For any to really say that Jesus is his Lord, he must first possess the Spirit of God as this alone confirms actual heavenly sonship.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, I Cor. 12:3) *And that no man can say*. . . —That is, that it cannot occur, or even happen, that anyone will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah who is not influenced by the Holy Spirit. The meaning is, not that no one has physical ability to say that Jesus is Lord unless aided by the Holy Spirit, since all people can say this; but that no one will be disposed heartily to say it; no one will acknowledge him as their Lord; it can never happen that anyone will confess him as the true Messiah who has not been brought to this state by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

True salvation will always include confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ,⁹ being filled with God's Holy Spirit,¹⁰ and being

⁷ John 1:18 *No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

⁸ Matt. 28:19 *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

⁹ Rom. 10:9–10 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* ¹⁰*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

¹⁰ Acts 2:4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

made a son of God through Christ.¹¹ For God to rightfully be any man's heavenly Father, there must be an acceptance of Christ and a receiving of the Holy Spirit sent by Him.¹² By these realities are men confirmed to be in the family of God, and without them they remain estranged from it.

Grace be unto you, and peace. This is the message that Paul and his companions hoped to impart to the Thessalonians, one of grace and peace. Grace is divine favor bestowed upon men. Because Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, God saved him.¹³ Observe that men can hope

to be saved by the Lord only when they are favored by Him. He who does not receive divine grace cannot be saved. Romans also reveals that it is by *grace* that men are saved through faith.¹⁴ Hence, even the process that God employs to save the sinner, faith,¹⁵ is an act of divine grace.

Peace. Peace is that which joins things together into a whole. It is “*eirḗnē* (from *eirō*, ‘to join, tie together into a whole’)—properly, wholeness, i.e. when all essential parts are joined together; peace (God’s gift of wholeness).”¹⁶ Man in his sinful condition is broken.¹⁷ His relationships

Acts 4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

11 John 1:12 *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

12 Luke 3:16 *John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:*

John 1:33 *And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*
John 14:16 *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.*

John 14:26 *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

John 15:26 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

13 Gen. 6:8 *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*

Heb. 11:7 *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

I Pet. 3:20 *Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*

II Pet. 2:5 *And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;*

14 Rom. 3:22–25 *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

15 Eph. 2:8 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

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17 Eccl. 7:20 *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

Isa. 64:6 *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

Rom. 3:10–18 *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹²They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. ¹³Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: ¹⁴Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: ¹⁵Their feet are swift to shed blood: ¹⁶Destruction and misery are in their ways: ¹⁷And the way of peace have they not known: ¹⁸There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

Rom. 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

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with God¹⁸ and other men¹⁹ have been severed. For healing to begin, there must first be reconciliation, and this reconciliation begins and ends with Jesus Christ. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 5:1). It is only through faith in the Son of God that peace with God can be entered into. Without reconciliation through the death of Christ, true peace with God and fellowship with other believers in Christ are unattainable.²⁰

I Thessalonians 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

Paul knew that the Thessalonians' conversion and growth were due solely to God, and for this he was thankful. This teaches us that only those who truly give thanks to the Lord know Him as the source of all blessings and goodness. Whenever there is a resurgence of faith and increased love in the people of God, it is because of God. Ultimately it is the Lord who gives and prompts an increase in His church,²¹ and this is always the case when divine attributes like faith and love become visible. Hence, whenever God's people bear spiritual fruit, you can know that the Lord is mightily involved in their lives. It is He who makes all things grow, increase, and

prosper, and without Him nothing can. *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase* (I Cor. 3:6).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 3:6) The power is not in the naked word, nor in him that plants, nor in him that waters, nor in the heart where it is sown, but in God. ... The seed must be sown or it will not germinate. Truth must be sown in the heart, and the heart must be prepared for it—as the earth must be plowed and made mellow, or it will not spring up. It must be cultivated with assiduous care, or it will produce nothing. But still it is all of God—as much so as the yellow harvest of the field, after all the toils of the farmer is of God. And as the farmer who has just views, will take no praise to himself because his grain and his vine start up and grow after all his care, but will ascribe all to God's unceasing, beneficent agency; so will the minister of religion, and so will every Christian, after all their care, ascribe all to God.

I Thessalonians 1:3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

The fact that the Thessalonians received the gospel and were willing to become subject to it revealed their willingness to allow God's power and authority over

18 Isa. 59:1–2 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: ²But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Eph. 2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

19 I Cor. 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

II Cor. 12:20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

20 Rom. 5:10–11 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. ¹¹And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Col. 1:20–22 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. ²¹And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled ²²In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight.

21 John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

their lives.²² No man will joyfully receive the gospel and at the same time reject its divine authority over himself. Whenever men place themselves in service to God and no longer live to merely please themselves, a true relationship with God has begun. The Thessalonians' work, labor, and hope proved the sincerity of their faith. Once a man truly believes, productive Christian works will follow him.

Work of faith. "Works of faith are those to which faith prompts, and which show that there is faith in the heart."²³ Men do many things not prompted by faith but rather by some selfish human motives. These will include works done to exalt self and actions done to impress others. The opposite of such carnal motivations is a *work of faith*, which has as its core trust in and reliance upon God. Faith also can be possessed only through first hearing the Word of God. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Rom. 10:17). This teaches us that it is impossible by biblical standards to engage in any truly godly work by merely desiring to do so. Hence, just as faith necessitates that God must first speak, a work of faith requires that the same Word of God must be revealed. Ultimately there is no such thing as a true work of the Lord that does not have its origination in God. Understanding this, we know that the Thessalonians performed works for God

that were inspired by Him. It was God Who was working in them to will and to do of His own good pleasure,²⁴ and the Thessalonians happily responded to the influences of God's divine Holy Spirit in their lives.

Christians were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, and those who possess sincere faith in the Father and in the Son will seek to live their lives fulfilling this divine purpose. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them* (Eph. 2:10). One of the great designs of the new birth is that God's new sons may be led by Him to do divine works for the kingdom. True Christians also will follow the example of their Savior, Jesus Christ, in going about and doing good.²⁵ When works done are inspired and purposed by God, the good that is done will bring glory to His name.²⁶ Scripture also encourages believers to continue doing good, as this is God's will for their lives.²⁷

Labour of love. Not only was faith a catalyst for the Thessalonians' service, but also *agape* love played a dominant role in leading them to exert spiritual labor for the Lord. When men truly love God, they are more than willing to labor for Him. Caring for His church is what Jesus instructed Peter to do when He repeatedly

22 Acts 17:1-4 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: ²And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. ⁴And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

23 Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 1:3

24 Phil. 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

25 Acts 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

26 Matt. 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

I Pet. 2:12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

27 Tit. 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

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asked him if he had true love for Christ.²⁸ When men take on the care and well-being of the people of God, it proves that they have true love for God in their hearts. But if a man does not truly love the brethren, whom he can see, and is not willing to serve them, then we know he does not sincerely love either God or the Son of God, both of Whom he cannot see.²⁹

No man can properly be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and have God as his Father if lacking the supernatural element of divine love in his heart, simply because if love is absent, it is impossible to possess any true knowledge of God. Though men may claim they know the Lord, without love they really cannot. Just as divine love reveals that God is in men's hearts, its absence reveals that He is not. *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love* (I John 4:8).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 4:8) He that loveth not, knoweth not God—Has no true acquaintance with God; has no just views of him, and no right feelings toward him. The reason for this is implied in what is immediately stated, that "God is love," and of course if they have no love reigning in their hearts, they cannot pretend to be like him.

(Matthew Poole's Commentary, I John 4:8) Yea, since love is his very nature, and that God is love, those that love (upon the account and in the way above expressed) are born of him, partake from him that excellent and most delectable nature, know him by a transformative knowledge: but they that love not, they are mere strangers to him, and never had to do with him.

²⁸ John 21:15–17 *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. ¹⁶He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. ¹⁷He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

²⁹ I John 4:20 *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen*

³⁰ Gal. 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

It is by walking in God's love that divine law is fulfilled. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law* (Rom. 13:10). Since God is love, when men pursue His disposition they reveal themselves as true followers of Him. Yet if men do not possess divine love for God and the people of God, though they may possess an abundance of other things, God's Word reveals that they are in the end counted by the Lord as nothing. Thus, if sincere love for God and His people is absent, then it makes no difference whatever else is done in Christ's name—it will not be accepted by God or regarded as anything worthy of divine reception. *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing* (I Cor. 13:2).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 13:2) I am nothing—All would be of no value. It would not save me. I should still be an unredeemed, unpardoned sinner. I should do good to no one; I should answer none of the great purposes which God has designed; I should not by all this secure my salvation. All would be in vain in regard to the great purpose of my existence. None of these things could be placed before God as a ground of acceptance in the Day of Judgment. Unless I should have love, I should still be lost.

It is impossible for a man to be saved and have been made new through Christ if love is not the dominant force in his life, simply because all those filled with God's Holy Spirit will be taught by God to love. Love is the very first fruit listed of the Spirit,³⁰ and all those truly filled with the Spirit

will have Its strong force both influencing and governing their lives. Hence, where the Holy Spirit of God truly is, the love of God will also reside. *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another* (I Thess. 4:9).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 4:9) *It is one of the first*—the elementary effects of religion on the soul, to lead us to love “the brethren”—and to do this is one of the evidences of piety about which there need be no danger of deception; compare 1 John 3:14.

Patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. At the center of all true hope is the person of Jesus Christ. For the Christian, every promise of blessing, forgiveness, and being accepted by God rests on the ministry of God's Son. There is therefore no realistic hope of entering the higher spiritual realm of God without the power, ministry, and spiritual ability of the Son of God, who makes it available. Thus, all true hope for the Christian lies in the very One Who has called him to heaven³¹

and now sits in heaven.³² Believers are instructed to wait for the Savior,³³ simply because all hope of entering into heaven and the heavenly transformation³⁴ required for it is dependent on the Son of God's power. Faith and love are thus not the only components to possessing true Christianity, but also the hope of Christ's return is essential for the continuance in faith. It is hope that allows the saved to endure and hope that gives confidence of greater things to come.

I Thessalonians 1:4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

All Christians owe their spiritual standing of being made sons of God to divine election. The Greek word for *election*, “*eklogē*,” is defined as a “divine selection.”³⁵ *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* defines *eklogē* as—

a. the act of picking out, choosing: σκευός εκλογής (the genitive of quality; cf. *Winners Grammar*, § 34, 3 b.; [Buttmann, 161 (140f)]), equivalent to εκλεκτόν, namely, τοῦ Θεοῦ, Acts 9:15;³⁶ specifically used of

31 I Cor. 1:9 *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*
32 Acts 7:55–56 *But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,* ⁵⁶*And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

Col. 3:1 *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

Heb. 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I Pet. 3:22 *Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.*

Rev. 3:21 *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*

33 I Cor. 1:7 *So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

Phil. 3:20 *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: I Thess. 1:10 *And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.**

Tit. 2:13 *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

34 I Cor. 15:52–53 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* ⁵³*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

Phil. 3:20–21 *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*

I John 3:2 *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

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36 Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:*

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that act of God's free will by which before the foundation of the world he decreed his blessings to certain persons;—ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν προφασίς, the decree made from choice (A. V. the purpose according to election.³⁷

Since none can respond to the gospel unless God has chosen them to be His own, saved men must be first chosen men. Jesus said, *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me* (John 10:27). What was true of Nathanael, that Jesus knew him before his call, is likewise true of saints today. When Nathanael asked Jesus, *Whence knowest thou me?* Jesus responded that He had first seen him when Nathanael was under a fig tree. This teaches us that when men are called, Christ has previously seen them and selected them to be His own. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee* (John 1:48).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, John 1:48) *When thou wast under the fig-tree*—It is evident that it was from something that had occurred under the fig-tree that Jesus judged of his character. What that was is not recorded. It is not improbable that Nathanael was accustomed to retire to the shade of a certain tree, perhaps in his garden or in a grove, for the purpose of meditation and prayer. The Jews were much in the habit of selecting such places for private devotion, and in such scenes of stillness and retirement there is something especially favorable for meditation and prayer. Our Saviour also worshipped in such places. Compare John 18:2; Luke 6:12.³⁸ In that place of retirement it is not improbable that Nathanael was engaged in private devotion.

I saw thee—It is clear, from the narrative, that Jesus did not mean to say that he was bodily

present with Nathanael and saw him; but he knew his thoughts, his desires, his secret feelings and wishes. In this sense Nathanael understood him. We may learn:

1. that Jesus sees what is done in secret, and is therefore divine.
2. that he sees us when we little think of it.
3. that he sees us especially in our private devotions, hears our prayers, and marks our meditations. And,
4. that he judges of our character chiefly by our private devotions. Those are secret; the world sees them not; and in our closets we show what we are. How does it become us, therefore, that our secret prayers and meditations should be without "guile" and hypocrisy, and such as Jesus will approve!

It is worthy of note that a man's faith in the Son of God is not the basis for being chosen but rather the *result* of it. *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you* (John 15:16). What is true of saints is equally true of apostles and other gift ministries in the church. Hence, for the body of Christ and those chosen to serve in it, divine election must precede earthly ordination.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, John 15:16) *Ye have not chosen me*—The word here translated "chosen" is that from which is derived the word "elect," and means the same thing. It is frequently thus translated, Mark 13:20; Matthew 24:22, Matthew 24:24, Matthew 24:31; Colossians 3:12.³⁹ It refers here, doubtless, to his choosing or electing them to be

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38 John 18:2 *And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.*

Luke 6:12 *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

39 Mark 13:20 *And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.*

apostles. He says that it was not because they had chosen him to be their teacher and guide, but because he had designated them to be his apostles. See John 6:70; also Matthew 4:18–22.⁴⁰

God has set the members in the body as it has pleased Him.⁴¹ It is thus by divine choice and not merely human will that men are saved by the Son of God. In truth, no man can truly be saved by the Lord until he is first chosen by Him.

I Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Distinguishing himself from those who possessed only words as evidence of their faith, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the gospel he preached had spiritual power accompanying it. To discern the difference between the true gospel of Jesus Christ and other religious doctrines that merely borrow Christ's name, one need only to examine if spiritual power is present or not. Practically, if those who preach the gospel do not have spiritual power in their ministries, then the Holy Spirit is not infusing them. One of the great attributes of those filled with the Holy Spirit is that divine power will enter

their lives. *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth* (Acts 1:8). Whenever men are truly led by the Spirit of God,⁴² it will be quite visible that God is the source of the word spoken by them, confirmed by the power of the Spirit manifesting Itself in their lives. Consequently, when the true gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, divine power will accompany it. But if men only profess Christ's name and possess no true relationship with His person, then all that is left is words, empty words, which though they may speak of the truth, prove that without spiritual power accompanying them, the Lord stands neither behind nor with them.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 1:5) In word only—Was not merely spoken; or was not merely heard. It produced a powerful effect on the heart and life. It was not a mere empty sound that produced no other effect than to entertain or amuse; compare Ezekiel 33:32.⁴³

But also in power—That is, in such power as to convert the soul. The apostle evidently refers not to any miracles that were performed there, but to the effect of the gospel on those who heard it. It is possible that there were miracles performed there, as there were in other places, but there is no mention of such

Matt. 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Matt. 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Matt. 24:31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Col. 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

⁴⁰ *John 6:70 Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?*

Matt. 4:18–22 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁹And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. ²⁰And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. ²¹And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. ²²And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

⁴¹ *I Cor. 12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*

⁴² *Rom. 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

⁴³ *Ezek. 33:32 And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.*

The Dead Shall Rise

a fact, and it is not necessary to suppose it, in order to see the full meaning of this language. There was great power manifested in the gospel in its leading them to break off from their sins, to abandon their idols, and to give their hearts to God...

If a man does not possess spiritual power in his ministry, you can be sure that the Lord Jesus Christ has not inspired it. If we learn anything from the study of Thessalonians, let it be this: the true gospel of Jesus Christ will always carry with it spiritual power. It is this that characterized Christ's own heavenly ministry, and it will be evident in all those baptized with the Holy Spirit today. Thus, when men come in God's name but do not possess God's power in their ministries, it is certain that they are not being led by the Holy Spirit.

The reason the gospel has power is that its source is Jesus Christ. *For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ* (Gal. 1:12). It was not from man, nor by man, that the apostle Paul brought forth the gospel, but only by and through receiving revelation from the resurrected Jesus

Christ. Ultimately, then, the reason the gospel of Jesus Christ possesses spiritual power is directly related to the power that God has given His Son. Because God has given complete authority to the Son, the gospel He sends in order to reveal Himself to the world will be accompanied by His power. *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth* (Matt. 28:18).

(*Benson Commentary*, Matt. 28:18) Dr. Whitby [states], "He to whom any office is duly committed, must have sufficient power and wisdom to discharge that office. Now to govern all things in heaven and earth belongs only to him who is the Lord and Maker of them, and therefore is known by this title, both in Scripture and by the heathen. To have power over death, and to be able to raise the dead, is to have that power which is proper to God alone: and to have power over the souls of men, and the knowledge of all hearts, belongs to God alone." Our Lord, therefore, is invested with, and exercises this authority and power, although as the Son of man, yet not as a mere man, for as such it would have been impossible for him to exercise it, but as a man in whom *dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily*.