

Evidence of Election part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, October 25, 2015

My, what a joy it is to hear you express the doxologies of your heart and what a wonderful song we had to sing, amen? The songs of redemption and thank you, musicians, for leading us so well. Thank you for your character, for your love for Christ and your excellence in musicianship.

This morning, I would like for you to take your Bibles and turn to Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians. It has been a number of years that Nancy and I have been here and by God's grace we are entering now into our 19th year at Calvary Bible Church. We have labored together with many of you. Some of you have been with us from the beginning and like the Apostle Paul who was thrilled with what he saw with the Thessalonian believers, we are thrilled with what God has done in you, what he has done in us, what we have done together, all by his grace and we can sincerely echo the words of the Apostle Paul as he celebrated the progress of the Thessalonians when he said in chapter 1, verse 2, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers." Likewise in chapter 2, verse 19, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." Then in chapter 3, verse 9, he says, "For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account."

Certainly, dear friends, that is the expression of our hearts and in this season of the life of Calvary Bible Church and certainly given our love for you, I believe the Holy Spirit would have us examine Paul's letter to the saints at Thessalonica so we will begin this verse-by-verse journey today, a journey that will have very many profound and practical insights for us. So I would encourage you in the weeks to come, to really familiarize yourself with this word. I would encourage you to read both 1 and 2 Thessalonians at least once every day. It should take you no more than ten minutes to read both of them. They are very short and this will help you really make these epistles a part of your life and it will really help you as I endeavor to unpack them.

Let me give you some background before we look at the first ten verses and primarily four of them. Thessalonica, located in the northern part of modern Greece, was a large seaport town of about a quarter of a million people. It was the largest and most important of all of the cities in the Roman province of Macedonia. It was located next to the Ignatian Way which was the major east/west highway in the Roman empire between what is now Albania and all the way up to Istanbul. Unlike Philippi, there was a large Jewish population in Thessalonica, enough that they could have a synagogue, and it was a strategic location for the Lord to plant a church because it was a seaport city, the sailors,

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not to mention the tradesmen that traveled the Ignatian Way, would be able to take the Gospel, at least what they heard about it, and spread it all over the ancient world.

We know according to Scripture that Paul first came to Thessalonica in his second missionary journey. You will recall in Acts 16 while Paul was in Troas, he saw a vision of a Macedonian imploring him to come to that province and preach the Gospel, so Paul along with Silas, crossed the Aegean Sea and came to Philippi where he unleashed the Gospel on those people and it caused a riot. People were very upset so they were arrested; they were beaten severely; they were placed in stocks; and then they were placed in the city's jail. Then we know that God miraculously released them from that jail by an earthquake that he brought about resulting in the jailor coming to a saving knowledge of Christ. But then when the magistrates of Philippi learned that they had just beaten Roman citizens without even giving them a trial, they were absolutely terrified because that was an act that could bring great consequences upon that city and upon them from Rome so they pleaded with Paul and Silas to get out of town, to leave Philippi.

So they did. They fled from Philippi up the Ignatian Way toward Thessalonica. They spent the night in a couple of towns, we're told, in Amphipolis and again in Apollonia and then finally, after being beaten, weak in mind and body, the kind of condition in which Christ's strength is made perfect, finally they get to Thessalonica and as was his custom, Paul first went to the synagogue where he once again preached the Gospel. He preached to them we know for at least three Sabbaths and there he argued from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah had to come first to die for sinners before he would establish his kingdom and that Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth that was crucified. And we know that Paul also had a ministry outside of the synagogue amongst the people and he worked to support himself in that city so he wouldn't be a burden to the people.

In these epistles, we learn much about the heart, the character of the Apostle Paul. We learn about him as a shepherd who had deep affection for these new converts that obviously the Jews had separated themselves from the synagogue to form a church and the Gentiles had joined in with them. So as a result of his ministry, some Jews and a larger number of Gentile proselytes and even some of the upper class Greek women believed in the Gospel. They were miraculously saved and it's just amazing to think, as Paul says, that the Gentiles turned from their idols to serve the living God.

This reminds me that whenever true conversions occur, it always makes quite a stir among family, among friends; rumors and slander always explode wherever grace triumphs. A true Christian is like a torch in a dungeon; he will be an unwelcomed light in the kingdom of darkness because his life and his message will expose the filth of sin. In fact, Jesus tells us in John 3, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the

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world, and men love darkness rather than Light, because their deeds are evil." Our goal, by the way, should never be to get the world to like us, but rather to manifest the light of Christ.

So the conversions of these Gentiles was truly remarkable. You must bear in mind that for the Jew to be converted to Christ meant that it would cost them basically their family, probably their livelihood, and Gentiles to abandon all of these gods that they worshiped, that they consulted: Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, on and on it goes. And now they're worshipping an invisible God, the one true God who exists in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a God that they could not see, a God that would tolerate no rival, a God that would not allow you to make him in any kind of an image, now they're worshipping this God. These people are giving up everything to enter the kingdom of Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, a Nazarene who was crucified for the sins of all who would believe.

Now, as the Jews saw the success of their ministry, they became outraged and they gathered a gang of thugs from the marketplace and they went to a man's house named Jason, and this must have been a place where Paul and Silas stayed, certainly this is where the other believers met. This may have been where Paul's workshop would have been. But not finding them, they seized Jason, the texts tell us, and some of the other brethren and they haul them before the city authorities. The text says that they drug them and claiming that these men, they've committed treason because they are worshipping another king named Jesus. Knowing how seriously Rome would deal with the city if they failed to keep order, especially in light of this kind of charge, the politarch or the city magistrates required Jason and the other brethren to put up a bond and this bond would be forfeited if they caused any other trouble and then they released them.

So Paul and Silas now understand the grave danger that Jason and the others are in and so they leave Thessalonica, they travel 50 miles to Berea where they enjoyed another successful ministry but from there, Paul is forced to leave. He flees to Athens. He leaves Silas and Timothy behind. Later they rejoin Paul at Athens but during this time, Paul is deeply concerned about these Thessalonian believers, afraid that perhaps they might fall back into pagan immorality and idolatry. So he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen them and to encourage them.

Well, then later, Timothy brings a report back to Paul and tells him about what's going on with them and it was encouraging report, a very encouraging report, but there were also some issues. There were some enemies that were slandering Paul and Silas saying that they were charlatans; they were just there to make money off of them; that they really didn't care about you, if they did, they wouldn't have run off. So the testing of their faith

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was very intense early on and it just got worse and like all churches where there are new believers, there were questions about doctrine. They were confused over certain things so while Paul is in Corinth, he writes the Thessalonian epistles to address all of these issues. He wrote both of them. The second one was written a few months after the first.

Here he will reveal many practical insights, the first one that we'll look at here this morning has to do with the evidences of election, as he calls it. He's going to tell us about essentials of a healthy growing church. We're going to read about attitudes and activities of a true shepherd. We're literally going to gain access into the heart of the Apostle Paul. He's going to address matters pertaining to those who have fallen asleep in Christ and he's especially going to answer questions pertaining to Christ's return. He's going to give us great insights into missionary proclamation of the Gospel and church planting and so forth.

So given this background, let's begin our study by examining these first ten verses of chapter 1, which is going to be a two part exposition pertaining to evidence of election. Now, you must understand, this is what thrilled Paul's heart. He could see a radical change in their lives which validated genuine saving faith; the proof that God had miraculously given them new life and this gave evidence of what Paul says in verse 4, "His choice of you." In the original language, "His choice, his selection, his election of you."

Now, before we read the text, I want you to join me. We're going to go in our imaginations to first century Thessalonica. We're probably gathered in a portico at someone's house, a large covered type of a porch. We may be meeting on the beach, the text doesn't say. But we have gathered together and if you were one of those new believers, this is what you'd be saying to yourself, "You know, I am about to hear from God himself through his inspired apostle who I have grown to love, a man that led me to a saving knowledge of Christ and I know there is all of my friends and family that think I've lost my mind but that's okay because I am seeing something so glorious in my life. I want to know more about it." If you were a Jew, you would be saying something like this, "Finally I'm free from the law. I want to know more about grace and I want to understand how I can survive the persecution from the family that I love and from all of my friends that are treating me like I've died." Or if you have come out of pagan idolatry, you're saying something like this, "All I have ever known is idol worship and unimaginable sexual immorality and now God has freed me from all of that and, oh, how I want to know more of who he is." And if you were one of those leading Greek women that had been converted, you're probably saying something like this, "Oh, how I long to hear more of Christ, to know how I can somehow reach my husband who is still involved in all of this debauchery. I don't know what he's going to do with me in light of all of that

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decadent lifestyle, but what I know is that when I heard the Gospel and by the power of the Spirit I believed, everything has been turned upside down in my life and now by the indwelling power of the Spirit, I long to please God. I long to hear of his greatness and his glory. My life is now revolving around the glory of Christ and I'm now with a group of believers, some of them that just a few weeks ago hated me and I hated them and now we're loving one another. The Gospel is the theme of every song, the topic of every conversation. Oh, how I want to hear more."

So this is what's going on and then it gets real quiet and the anticipation is absolutely electric as someone stands up and unrolls a papyrus scroll and reads this.

1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Oh, dear friends, this would have been cool water to a parched tongue. This would have been living water to souls that were longing to know more of the glory of God, to know more of Christ. I'm sure they were thinking, "I cannot wait to write down my copy." They couldn't go to the store and buy one so they would write it down. In fact, most of them would memorize all of the text. "Oh, I can't wait to savor every morsel of what I just heard. I want to ponder every thought." By the way, I hope you all will be the same as we go through the text.

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So, first, let's look at what the Spirit of God says in his salutation here. Letters in the Greco-Roman world followed a standard format which always included a salutation, then a body, and then a conclusion and that's what we have here. A salutation or a greeting would be what we see in this first verse, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy." Now, let's look at these for just a moment. First of all, notice that Paul humbly includes his co-laborers who served along with him as equals in ministry. And "Paul" translates the Jewish name which was "Saul" which was very appropriate because Paul descended from the tribe of Benjamin and Saul was the king that arose from that tribe. It's interesting to note that some of the early church fathers saw some special significance in the Greek name "Paulos," "os" at the end, because it was derived from the Roman or the Latin "Paulus," "us" at the end, which meant "little or small." In fact, Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, called Paul, "the man three cubits tall," so evidently he was a short man. A cubit, by the way, is either 18 inches or in some cases they had what was called the long cubit which would be 20 inches, which would make him about five feet tall. Now, we don't know that precisely but evidently he was a short man. In fact, the Acts of Paul and Thecla which is one of the New Testament apocryphal books, describe him as, "bald headed, bowlegged, strongly built, a man small in size with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man and at times he had the face of an angel." Quite a description of our brother.

Well, regardless of his physical stature, we know that Paul regarded himself spiritually as a very little man, in fact, the most insignificant of all. He said of himself that he was the very least of all the saints. As I pondered this, I was reminded that in the Old Testament we read that King Saul was taller and more handsome than all of his countrymen and he had the physical characteristics that people look for in a ruler, however, Paul's outward appearance would basically be the opposite but we also know that God does not look upon the outward appearance, but upon the heart and in Paul's case, he had a heart that had been radically changed.

There is also Silvanus which could be translated Silas. We don't know much about him. He was probably a Hellenistic Jew and a prominent member of the Jerusalem church. He was sent with Paul to Antioch to communicate the decision, you will recall, of the counsel of Jerusalem in Acts 15. And from there after Paul had that argument with Barnabas over John Mark, Paul chose Silas to be his co-worker during his second missionary journey. We also know, by the way, that Silas was Peter's scribe.

Then we have Timothy who was a native of Lystra in Galatia, a part of Asia Minor, and he was Paul's son in the faith. He was his protege who Paul trusted to send to various churches on critical missions to help them and he later became the pastor at the church of Ephesus.

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So together, these three men are instrumental in founding this great church in Thessalonica and he says, "To the church of Thessalonica." Church is ekklesia, the original language, and it means "the called out ones or the elect ones." This is especially important because it's used in connection with verse 4, "His choice of you." So he says, "To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ." "In," very important. Here he emphasizes the very visible union they had with Christ and this is exhilarating to Paul and to Silas and to Timothy. Folks, we must bear in mind that we participate in Christ's risen life. We have been hidden in him. He is part of us. We are part of him. Do not ever think that the Savior came to just live outside of us, but rather he is the one who dwells within us. He has redeemed us that he might inhabit us. We are part of him, he is a part of us in some inscrutable way. In fact, in John 17, Jesus prayed to the Father in verse 22, "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them that they may be one just as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected in unity."

So what an amazing thought to know that Jesus not only came to pay the penalty for our sin, but also to establish an intimate, living, eternal union with us so that we can become one with him. Galatians 3:28, "We are all one in Christ Jesus." 1 Corinthians 1:30, "But by his doing, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." And we know that throughout the New Testament, we see various images that describe this mystery, various figures that the Spirit of God uses. For example, in Ephesians 5, he speaks of us as the church being the bride and Christ as the bridegroom. There you see that amazing union that we have in Christ. In John 6, you have the figure of the body and the food. In other words, we have life by partaking of Christ even as Christ had life by partaking of the Father, the text tells us. In John 15, you have the figure of the vine and the branches that picture that life giving organic bond that we have in Christ; the likeness of our nature; the eternal impartation of life; the ability to bear fruit and so forth. In Ephesians 1 that we read earlier, we are told of the figure of the head and the body and now we also see Christ pictured in 1 Corinthians 12, you are Christ's body and individually members of it.

So we're part of this amazing spiritual organism and he is reminding these dear brothers and sisters of this reality in the salutation, that you cannot function outside of the body as independent organs. We all respond to the head of the body who is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a marvelous, mystery union that has no parallel. There is no analogy that we have in human experience. It's for this reason that Paul says in Colossians 1:26, he speaks of "the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of

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the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is," in other words, "Here it is, folks, are you ready? Here's the mystery," "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

So he says this here to the Thessalonians, "To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Lord Jesus Christ, what a profound phrase. Lord speaking; Kurios he is; Jehovah, the God of Israel; the Creator; the one who rules in unassailable sovereignty over his creation. He is the highly exalted one; the object of our worship; infinitely worthy of all of our allegiance. He is not only Lord, he is Jesus, which means "Jehovah saves." The name that was given to him at his birth by the Father underscoring the humility of his incarnation, underscoring his humanity; fully God, yet fully man; the Savior of our sin that purchased our redemption by his very blood. Then the term "Christ" which means "the anointed one." The Greek term for the Messiah of Israel promised by the Old Testament prophets, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then he says, "Grace to you." I love that. Grace to you. In other words, "I want you to experience the reality of God's unmerited favor in your life. I want you to experience the joy of sins forgiven: past, present and future. I want you to enjoy the promise of his presence in your life for eternity. And I also want you to experience peace, the objective peace that the war is over, the holy God that you have offended has now been appeased by the Lord Jesus Christ in whom you have placed your trust. And I also want you to experience the subjective peace of the presence of God deep within your soul."

Paul moves then from his salutation to the body of his letter and he begins with, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers." My, how I can identify with that statement with all of you with respect to my family at Calvary Bible Church. Here's why, verse 3, "constantly," not just every now and then but he is "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you." Now, this is so encouraging to Paul and it's so encouraging to any pastor because I have talked with pastors many times, in fact, I talked with one just a couple of weeks ago. A heart-breaking conversation. He has a congregation where he is quite convinced that the majority of them do not know Christ but think they do. What a heart-breaking thing. Jesus warned about this in Matthew 7. He basically tells us there that the majority of people that call Jesus Lord will never enter the kingdom, even though they do lots of religious things, because they're deceived. They've been deceived by religious lies and they're all self-deceived. You will recall in Matthew 7, Jesus makes it very clear that every person has two options both promising heaven: one will be true, the other will be a lie and we've got to choose. One will be a religion basically of human achievement, the other a religion of divine accomplishment. In Matthew 7, he tells us that there will the true way which will be very hard to enter and

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few will even find it, and then there will be the false way which will be easy and many will choose that way. He tells us that we must choose between two gates: the narrow and the wide. Between two ways: the narrow and the broad. That will lead to two destinations: life or destruction. That there are two groups of people: the few and the many. And they are likened to two kinds of trees: the good and the bad. There are two kinds of people who profess Christ: the sincere and the false. There are two kinds of spiritual builders: the wise and the foolish. And they build upon two kinds of religious foundations: one being rock, the other being sand. They live in two kinds of houses of faith: one that will withstand the storms of final judgment, and the other that will collapse in a heap of eternal damnation.

But here in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he is thrilled to know, as we see in verse 4, to know without a shadow of a doubt that these are true believers chosen by God. Now, how does he know this? What gives him such confidence? And therefore what must we look for in ourselves? What are some of the characteristics of genuine saving faith? Or in this context, given Paul's words, his choice of you? Well, he begins with three characteristics that we'll look at briefly here this morning. The others we'll look at the next time we're together. Three characteristics that everyone should be able to observe in the life of a person who has genuinely been born again. 1. Their work of faith. 2. Their labor of love. 3. Their steadfastness of hope.

Now, let's look at this again in verse 2 just to set this up. He says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers." By the way, this suggests that they prayed together mentioning each one by name. We don't know how many were in the church, probably roughly 100 people. We're not sure; it could have been more. But there was no vagueness in their prayers and he says, "constantly bearing in mind," first of all, "your work of faith." Folks, this is the first fruit of grace; the first evidence of election. Their work of faith. Now, bear in mind, here God has given honor that he is due for his marvelous work because we know biblically that genuine saving faith is a gift from God that begins with a Spirit-empowered brokenness that causes a person to see the depths of their sin and the glory of Christ, their salvation that can be in him alone and therefore by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, they are saved. So faith requires humility and repentance and this is what Paul and the others see in this new church.

Now, imagine the shock this would have been to the family and friends of the Thessalonians that believed. Jews and Gentiles coming together in mutual love for a crucified Savior? And if that isn't crazy enough, they're actually loving one another despite unimaginable differences in religion and culture. My, what a joy it is to see believers love each other who are so different despite all of the backgrounds and

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preferences. Now, bear in mind, that when he says "work of faith" this does not speak of salvation by works. That is a heresy. It speaks of works that are produced by faith. In fact, we're told in Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship," not our own workmanship, we are his workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Recently I was talking with a person who was a part of a cult trying to earn his way into heaven and we were in the airport. Airports are always a great place to preach the Gospel, aren't they? So we were talking and I was kind of hearing his religious system and I could sense the frustration that he's trying really hard and I asked him the question, I said, "So I'm curious, do you think you'll make the cut?" He said, "Well, I hope so. I'm trying really hard." And we went on from there and I was able to share the Gospel with him. But we see in Scripture like in Romans 3:20, "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested." He goes on to say in verse 24 and following, sinners are "justified as a gift by God's grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." In other words, as a satisfaction to a holy God for our sin.

So "work of faith" speaks of holy conduct that is produced by faith and the term "work" just literally speaks of actual deeds, righteous acts. So this will always be the proof of regenerating grace; the transforming power of regeneration which is the instantaneous impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead. As a result of that, one's nature, one's disposition changes and they have a passion to give God glory in their life and to honor Christ with deeds of righteousness. We know that faith without these kinds of works is dead, as James tells us.

Now, imagine what this would have looked like. Paul and Silas come into Thessalonica and they did not do what I was told to do last week in another email that I got about a seminar from a very well-known major church growth guru. They didn't do what I was told to do, which by the way, is basically this: if you want to grow a church, you've got to have a way of reaching the children in the community. So basically here's all of these ideas how you do all of these things to basically bring the children into the church to basically form a community center for the children and then also do the same type of thing with the youth and they have all the things from the type of music you need to play and basically they were saying you kind of have to replace the mall where young people go to hang out to be cool and all of that type of thing. Then as you do that, then the adults will come and when they come, you've got to be very careful. You've got to be very

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seeker sensitive. You've got to give them a feel good Gospel. This guy had kind of a prosperity Gospel type of a message. And as you do that, they're going to be so enamored with everything that's going on, they're going to want to join your church. By the way, there are thousands of churches that look like that.

But as we look at verse 6 here, we see that these dear folks received the word. That's what Paul used. He wasn't ashamed of the Gospel. That's the power of God unto salvation, they "received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit , so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia." Obviously, their lives did not conform to the culture, their lives confronted the culture. Their lives rose above all of the vile insults and accusations that were hurled against them in the midst of this bitter persecution. You see, people could look at them and see there is something different about this person. Folks, that's a result of the work of the Spirit of God in the life of a person who has truly been born again and I would ask you: is this what people see in you? Or are you a chameleon Christian that can blend in to make sure everybody likes you?

Notice the second evidence of God's choice of them. Not only their work of faith but their labor of love. The term "labor" in the original language speaks of grueling, strenuous, exhausting toil. So what he's saying here if I could give you an analogy: it's like a man straining with every fiber of his being to climb a steep cliff. These people did the same thing: they exerted everything they had to advance the kingdom and the glory of Christ, how? By loving their neighbor, by loving their enemies, and by loving one another from the bottom of their heart. You see, their genuine love for Christ produced within them the power to love their enemies and even love their brothers and sisters in Christ in the church which sometimes is really hard to do. I'm reminded of that saying:

"To dwell above with saints we love,
Will be grace and glory.
But to live below with the saints we know,
Now that's a different story."

Folks, can you imagine what it would have been like? Jews and Gentiles? I don't even know if there is an analogy that I could come up with to help you think of this but they hated each other and only a miracle of God would unite those kinds of extremes together in the bond of love where they would actually prefer one another. You know, so often in the church, we have the, "Well, I love them but..." mentality. Have you ever heard of that? I love them but... "Oh well, I love her but she's just so struck on herself. I really don't want anything to do with her. Oh well, I love him but he is just such an arrogant

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Evidence of Election part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, October 25, 2015

showoff. Well, yes, I love them but they're just so superficial and they just don't appreciate what I have to offer." And on and on it goes.

But by the power of the Spirit of God, these people labored in their love for one another and, folks, that's the point. By the way, if this is difficult for you, if there are people within the church that you really can't stand, you need to ask the Lord to give you the power to labor in love for those people. The Lord will bless that. You need to wield the ax of confession upon the root of every sin and then with repentance throw it in the fire. This kind of love is the firstfruit of the Spirit when we walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh, in Galatians 5:22, and it's always a certain proof of salvation. 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life," how? "Because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."

So Paul gets this report from Timothy and it's going everywhere. "These people really love each other." Again, when you think of the difference between Jews and Gentiles, it's like that can only be a miraculous work of the Spirit. And they are loving their enemies. What a testimony to the power of the Gospel. So not only are they thrilled and thankful over their work of faith and labor of love, but there's also a third evidence of their election and that is their steadfastness of hope.

Notice again verse 3, "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing," in other words, the facts speak so clearly that the conclusion is obvious. That's what the original language means with that term. "Knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you," or in other words, the evidence of your election. Now, the term "steadfast" is a fascinating term in the original language. It basically could be translated "endurance or perseverance." It carries with it the idea of persevering willingly under great pressure. Their endurance, therefore, was inspired by something here and it was inspired by the hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what he's saying here that is thrilling his heart is that you have a persevering anticipation of seeing the glory of Christ and receiving the eternal inheritance that he has promised you. This is the motivating force that you have to be able to survive all of the suffering and temptation because, again, Paul was so afraid when he had left them that they would fall back into all of that immorality and fall back into the keeping of the law if they were a Jew and so forth. But they didn't do that. Now, the question is: how could they avoid that? Were they able to somehow develop some inner resolution strong enough to tough it out on their own strength? No, what we see here is the reason they could do that is because of their confidence that Christ was going to do all that he had promised to do. Folks, this is a Spirit-empowered attitude; a reality in the life of every believer. In

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fact, John tells us in 1 John 5:4, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world." He goes on to say this, "and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Those who do not believe that have no hope deep within their soul. True believers are, as Paul said in Titus 2, probably about verse 13, they're "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us." In fact, the writer of Hebrews describes to us in Hebrews 6 how God interposed with an oath the promise of the unchangeable nature of his purpose to grant us an inheritance. In verse 18 we read, "that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie," he says, "we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast," there's the term again, "and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us." In other words, our confidence that motivates us, that animates our godliness and commitment to Christ even in the midst of bitter persecution, that confidence that we have is anchored in God's unchangeable promise and his unchangeable oath, the expectation that Christ is going to do all that he has promised to do. I would ask you: do you live in light of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you have a passion for the inheritance that he has promised to you?

I'm reminded of Solomon's words in Proverbs 4:18. There he says, "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day." It's an amazing text, isn't it? The point is this: as we as believers traverse the path of life, we don't go from light until it comes to darkness. It's just the opposite. We go from defused light to the clear, resplendent, glorious light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ. The brilliant light of heaven was once a distant glimmer, but as we grow in Christ, it blazes forth ever more brightly. You see, there is no sunset for the believer, it's only sunrise, and the more we commit ourselves to a work of faith, to a labor of love and have this steadfastness of hope, the more we're able to transcend the darkness of this world and the more evident it will be that we truly know Christ.

I want to close with a thought and I hope this will be especially an encouragement to those of you that are struggling in some significant ways and I know there are several of you struggling with some relational issues, there are just so many things. I pray that you will really examine your heart with respect to your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope, and maybe what I'm about to tell you will help. I have a picture, Nancy and I have a picture in our home. It's one of my favorite pictures. It's a picture of an eagle soaring effortlessly, very high in the sky in the mountains. I've seen that in the Rocky Mountains so many times. Such a beautiful sight and it's interesting that even in the picture you can see that he's just sailing aloft. There is no need to even flap his wings

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to hold himself up because the wind is doing it all for him. What the eagle knows to do is to position himself in the right place so that he can float on the air. And on that picture, Isaiah 40:31 is written, "Those who hope in the LORD shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles."

Beloved, please hear this: if we put our trust, our hope in the Lord, he will lift us up above this wretched world and we will be able to soar on the wings of his power and with the wind of his Spirit and the way that we do that is by positioning ourselves according to his will; seeing how we can manifest this work of faith, this labor of love, this steadfastness of hope, and when we do that, we will just experience the Spirit of God helping us along, not down in the swamps of the world, but up in the glorious heights of the glory of God where we can experience the fullness of his love. Oh, what a joy it is when we live for Christ, when we anticipate his return, amen? What a glorious thing that is. I hope this will be the passion of every heart and especially for those of you who are struggling, let me pray for you.

Father, thank you for these words of encouragement. My, how they speak so clearly to our hearts. Thank you for that work of grace. We know that there is nothing that we could have done to have figured this out or to make this happen. This is all by your power. But, Lord, I pray for those who are struggling in significant ways; those who are waiting for the right husband to come along or the right wife to come along; those who are waiting for some great repentance to occur in the life of a spouse or a family member. Lord, those who are awaiting your clear direction in their life. Lord, there are so many things that bring us down but we know that by the power of your Spirit when we live consistently with the truths that we have heard today, we know that like the eagle, you will help us to sail aloft and experience the glory of your grace and your power and your love. So I pray that that will happen for each one of us and that you might receive all of the glory for it is in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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