

How to Recognize God's Elect

Sunday, February 1st, 1987

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. 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.”

Here is our text this morning; I am going to be reading from the book of 1 Thessalonians 1: verses 4 and 5. I'll be speaking on the subject: “HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S ELECT.”

We are going to have a little plain talk. I would like for you to pull up your chair and get your Bible. Open it to 1 Thessalonians 1: verses 4 and 5 and let me speak to you a little while on this subject: “HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S ELECT.”

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, *“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”* What he is saying is I know that you are God's elect. He is saying, *“Brethren, beloved of the Lord, (I know that you are one of God's elect) for our Gospel came not unto you in Word only but also in power, in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance.”*

My friends; almost every religionist is guilty at one time or another of judging the spiritual state of someone else, almost every religionist. We think we know who is saved and who is not saved. We think we know who is going to heaven and who is not going to heaven.

Most religionists call themselves, (and you have heard them say this), “Well, I'm a fruit inspector and we look at people's lives and we listen to people's conversations.” We examine their doctrine and we decide who is a child of God and who is not a child of God, who is going to heaven and who is going to perish.

Old John Newton wrote something one time that I found very interesting, he said; “When I get to heaven three things are going to amaze me.”

First of all: “I am going to be amazed to find that some people are in heaven that I never expected to be there.”

Secondly: “I'm going to miss some people that I was almost sure would be there.”

Thirdly: He said, “The thing that will probably amaze me the most is to find myself, John Newton, standing in the presence of Almighty God perfectly conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Well, so few of us have that kind of attitude. This strong Calvinist is quite certain that no Arminian could possibly be saved. The Arminian is equally certain that no Calvinist will ever be in glory.

I am reminded of two men of the past; their names are Augustus M. Toplady and John Wesley. Both of them claimed to love Christ; both of them claimed to preach the Gospel but they were the bitterest of enemies.

Augustus Toplady called John Wesley “D.D.” (that means dead dog). Wesley got the rumor out that Toplady denied everything that he preached before he died. I think that Toplady got up off the sick bed, went to church and denied what Wesley had told on him. This is so true of us.

You’ve probably heard of the separationist and the strong moralists. He is just sure and positive that anyone who drinks a bottle of beer, smokes a cigarette or goes to the movies could possibly be saved; he just couldn’t possibly be saved.

The Christian liberty advocate, the man who believes that he has certain liberties in Christ is equally positive that no separationists could possibly be saved. He doesn’t call him a separationist; he doesn’t call him a moralist; he calls him a legalist. He is just positive that no legalist can enter heaven, because he says; “he must be trusting his works.” That’s just the way we are.

You have the church sectarian, the fellow that is married to the church, devoted to the church and preaches church truth. He is just sure that no universalist or no one outside his denomination could possibly know God Almighty. Almost every denomination is sure that they have a corner on God Almighty like the Jews of old.

You have the man with the great experience. Here is a man that has had an unusual experience. He has mourned over sin, grieved over sin and gone through years of conviction like Joseph Hart of old, who said that he wrestled eleven years trying to find the Lord. He went through the valley of despair, depression and conviction for eleven years and finally he found Christ.

We have many people who profess to have that kind of experience. They just know that if you don’t have an experience that matches theirs, if you don’t have some kind of

climatic experience that is equal to theirs then you can't possibly be saved. They say you haven't mourned enough or grieved enough. You don't feel enough and you are bound to perish.

One man says, "That if you doubt your salvation you are damned." Another man comes along and says, "If you don't doubt; it is because you don't have anything to doubt."

We are busy trying to decide who is going to heaven and who is going to hell, who is saved and who is not saved. We are deciding who is among God's children and who are not among God's children.

I have found that some of the Lord's most faithful servants, rather than questioning other people's interest in the Lord Jesus; they question their own. Old John Newton who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me," also wrote this hymn:

Tis a point I long to know,
Of it gives me anxious thought,

Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His or am I not?

Lord, if indeed I am Thine,
If Thou art my Son and my Song,

Then why do I languish and pine,
And why are my winters so long?

Oh drive these dark clouds from my sky,
Thy soul cheering presence restore,

Or Lord just take me unto Thee on high,
Where winter and clouds are no more

The truth of the matter is, (now listen to me), just like I said, we are going to have some plain talk. The truth of the matter is that you and I have no way of knowing the spiritual condition of anyone else. We just do not have any way of knowing.

This thing of salvation is a heart matter and you have never yet been able to see anyone else's heart. The fact of the matter is; you don't even know your own heart, let alone anyone else's.

The Scripture says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"* I will tell you who knows who is saved, *"The Lord knoweth them that are His,"* and only the Lord.

However, I do say this; I believe that a man himself can know his own spiritual condition and whether or not he has a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. He can verily, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13, *"Examine himself whether he be in the faith."*

He will have a hard time examining every one else, but he can examine himself. That is what Paul said, *"Know ye not your own selves, whether Christ is in you?"* I'm not talking about your doctrine that is in you or your feelings that are in you, but is Christ in you?

"Know ye not your own selves if Christ be in you except you be a reprobate?" Yes sir! An individual, a person can give diligence himself to *"make his calling and election sure."* You can't make anybody else's calling or election sure, but you can make your own. You can make your own calling and election sure by giving diligence. Peter said, *"If you do this, you will never fail."*

A lot of the old-timers had some confidence of their interest in Christ. In fact, they had some assurance. Listen to David, *"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."* I shall not want for anything. I shall not lack anything. Everything the Law demands, everything that God requires and everything that justice needs is met in my Lord. *"He is my Shepherd and I will never want."*

Job said, *"I know my Redeemer liveth."* Whatever condition Job was in, whether he was a self-righteous man or not, I don't know. I'm not saying that he was or that he wasn't. I do know that he said this: *"I know my Redeemer lives."*

Paul the apostle said, *"I know whom I have believed. I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."*

John said this, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life."* He said, *"What I know I preached to you. What I have seen and heard; I preached to you."* This is no fancy and this is no fairytale; *"I know that I have passed from death unto life."*

Here, in our text; I read it to you a moment ago in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1; the apostle Paul spoke quite positively of his friends down there in Thessalonica. He said of them, *“Brethren, beloved of the Lord; I know that you are God’s elect.”*

Paul is quite unlike us. The apostle Paul did not delight in any man perishing; he delighted in a man being saved. He said on one occasion, in Romans 9; *“I’m so concerned for my friends; I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsman in the flesh.”*

On another occasion he said, *“I have continual heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren in the flesh;”* He wants them to be saved. What he is saying is that he doesn’t want to gloat over their miss-fortune; he doesn’t want to see them gloat over their infirmities. Paul doesn’t want to gloat over their failures; he wants to be a living intercessor for other men; he wants to pray for them and see them come to know Christ.

He said of these people in Thessalonica, *“I believe that you are saved. I believe that you are God’s elect. I believe that you are God’s own and I’m going to tell you the reason I believe that.”* He gives several reasons why he believed these children to be *“children of God.”* Would you like to listen to them?

Take your Bible and look at 1 Thessalonians 1:4. Paul gives several reasons why he believes that these people were God’s elect. If they are God’s elect they are God’s children. Being God’s children they are God’s heirs. Being God’s heirs they are *“joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.”* Being a joint-heir with Jesus Christ they will spend eternity in glory.

The first reason he gives is this: He said, *“I believe that you are God’s elect because our Gospel, (the Gospel of God’s glory, the Gospel of His free grace, the Gospel of His sovereign mercy, the Gospel of His dear Son, the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ, the Gospel of substitution, the Gospel of the atonement), “our Gospel didn’t come to you in Word only, but it came in power. It came in the Holy Ghost and it came in much assurance.”* That is the only Gospel that Paul knew or preached.

My friends; it is true that the Gospel must come to a man in words. He can’t hear the Gospel without words. Words are the vehicles of thought. Words are means of expression. The only way that you can know what I am thinking is for me to tell you in words, either word pictures or word’s spoken.

In Romans 10 it says, *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in*

Him of whom they have not heard? How are they going to hear without a preacher?"
You have to hear words.

I know that salvation is of the heart but God doesn't bypass the mind. The heart can only believe what the mind understands. That is so! You comprehend to some measure and to some degree what you have heard. In Romans 1:16, Paul says; *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of salvation unto everyone that believeth."*

In Mark 16, our Lord sent His disciples out to preach and He said; *"You go out into all the world and preach the Gospel. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned."*

Peter said in 1 Peter 1:23, *"We are born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever."* It is true that a man must hear the Gospel in words but the elect, the true believer hears *"not in word only,"* that is what Paul says. It is not just words only.

You see; words alone will not save. Facts alone will not bring a man to God. All men hear words. The difference is in how you hear. Do you see what I am saying? These people heard the Gospel in word, but *"not in word only."*

They did not just go out to argue a doctrine or argue a custom, tradition or something else. You might say, "How long did the Lord lay in the grave? Where did He go while His body was in the grave? Where did Cain get his wife?"

Folks like to argue about all of these things. These are just words, words, words and that is all. They are always arguing over words, disputing over customs, traditions and genealogy and laws. It just gets you into a mess.

They heard the Gospel in power. They heard the Gospel in power on the conscience to convict of sin. They heard the Gospel in power on the heart to embrace Christ. They heard the Gospel in power on the mind to behold Christ our Righteousness and Christ our Atonement and Christ our Sin-bearer, Christ our Scapegoat and Christ our Refuge.

They heard the Gospel in mind so that they could conceive of God's great plan of redemption, God's great purpose in redeeming His people while satisfying the Law, honoring the Law, magnifying the Law and satisfying His Justice. They heard the Gospel in power (on the will) to make them willing to confess Christ and to follow Christ.

Old George Whitfield had a tabernacle over in England where he preached quite often. He was out of town preaching somewhere one night and had a substitute preacher. There was a bunch of over grown boys in their late teens walking by the tabernacle. This was years ago.

One of the boys said to another boy whose name was John Williams, “John Williams; why don’t you go in old man Whitfield’s tabernacle and see what time it is.” Not everyone had a watch back in those days. They didn’t wear the wrist watches and not everyone had one.

In old man Whitfield’s tabernacle there was a clock back on the back wall, opposite from the preacher. So, John Williams volunteered to go in. He walked into that tabernacle, opened the door and he looked up but he couldn’t see the clock. He had to walk down the aisle of this tabernacle and there was a man in the pulpit preaching the Gospel.

He was preaching Christ and Him crucified. He was preaching the Gospel of regeneration, the Gospel of redemption, the good news that God saves sinners by the death of His Son. He heard the good news that “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,*” but Christ became a man and died for sinners.

John Williams started listening to the preacher as he was walking down the aisle to look at the clock. He stood spell-bound listening to that man’s message. Do you know that the Spirit of God through the Word of God, broke the heart of that proud, rebellious, young man, named John Williams and saved him that night?

He heard the Gospel in word, but he also heard it in power. The Gospel broke his heart and brought him to his knees and brought him to faith in Christ. That is what I am talking about. John Williams became one of the greatest missionaries who ever took the Gospel around the world. That is power! That is what I am saying, the true believer hears the Gospel in power.

Not only that, he hears it in the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is sent of God. Our Lord said, “*When He is come, He will convince the world of sin.*” The Holy Spirit convicts of sin. When He comes “*He will glorify me. He will not speak of Himself but He will speak of me. When He comes He will take the things of mine and show them to you.*”

That is what the Holy Spirit does. We are born of the Spirit; we are quickened by the Spirit; we’re convicted by the Holy Spirit; we have Christ revealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches believers; the Holy Spirit intercedes for us; the Holy Spirit guides us and the Holy Spirit comforts us.

Apart from the Spirit of God a man will lay dead in his dark, spiritual grave but the Holy Spirit regenerates. These people heard the Gospel in power; they heard it in the power of the Holy Ghost, and watch this; *“And they heard the Gospel in much assurance.”*

There are two things that are evident here. First of all: They heard it with the assurance that the Gospel was true. *“This is the record; God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son.”* That is the record and it is true; *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.”*

You can bank on it and you can believe it; it is true! It came to these people in power, in Holy Spirit conviction and revelation and in assurance; they believed the Gospel was true.

Second: The assurance of their own interest in that Gospel was evident. Paul said, *“I know whom I have believed.”* I can’t speak for others. It is like the prophet of God in the Old Testament, he said; *“I don’t know which way you are going but ‘as for me and my house we are going to serve the Lord.’”* That is confidence and that is assurance.

Paul said, *“I know you are one of the elect;”* I know that you are one of God’s own. When our Gospel was preached, you didn’t just hear a bunch of doctrines, words, or things to debate. He said, *“Our Gospel came to you in power; it came to you in the Holy Ghost. It came to you in much assurance”* (and you knew it to be true). You knew by God’s grace your interest in that Gospel. Sink or swim I go to Him.

Third: Paul said, *“Brethren; I know you’re elect; I know that you are one of God’s own; I know that you belong to the Lord. I know that you not only heard the Gospel in power but “you became followers of us and the Lord.”*

Do you know what our Master said? He said, *“My sheep hear My voice.”* They hear it in power; they hear it in the Holy Ghost and they hear it in much assurance. They do what? Well, they just hear it and push it away and push it aside. They say, *“We’ll hear it again at another season when we have a more convenient time.”* Oh no, He said; *“They hear Me and they follow Me and I give them eternal life and they will never perish.”* What I am saying is that a man is not just a Christian in creed but he is also a Christian in deed. I’m saying that a man is not just a Christian in action and tradition but is a Christian in attitude.

God makes him a new creature in heart. He becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. He not only bows to Jesus Christ as His only Saviour, he bows to Christ as his living Lord and Master. When Paul says, "*You became followers of us and the Lord;*" he is saying this, "Believers are not only identified with the Lord but they identify with one another."

My friends; you listen to me, true Christians love the Word of God; they love the House of God; they love the Law of God and they love the church of God. Paul is careful to point out that "*they love the people of God.*"

They seek out those who know their Lord and they seek out those who love their Lord. They seek out those who love His Gospel and they are quick to identify with God's people.

I hear people say, "Well; I'm a believer but I don't have any part in any fellowship with any church." Now, you wait a minute! Paul said, "*I know brethren, you're elect of God because this Gospel, (this one Gospel, this common Gospel of the common salvation) came to you in power in the Holy Ghost and much assurance and you became followers, not only of the Lord, but of us.*"

You were identified with us and "*you were not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor were you ashamed of us His servants.*" You can't be ashamed of Christ and be one of Christ's own; his body is Christ. To follow Christ is to follow Him fully.

Did you ever read the story of Caleb? I don't know why Caleb's mother would name him Caleb. Do you know what his name means? His name means (I'm told) "The Faithful Dog". That's right!

That is what Caleb was. He was the Lord's dog and he was a faithful dog. Every time you hear one of the people talk about Caleb, do you know how they identify him? They say, "Caleb; he's the fellow that *followed the Lord fully.*"

He followed Him in heart; he followed Him in deed. He said, "*My servant Caleb has got another Spirit.*" He is not like the rest of those fellows; he has another Spirit. He had the Spirit of faithfulness, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of loyalty and the Spirit of dedication. "My servant Caleb is the faithful dog. He follows Me even when he stands alone."

The people said, "*We can't take that country,*" but Caleb said, "*God said we could and I believe that we can.*" He followed the Lord all the days of his life. He was one of those who died in the faith.

"I know you are elect," Paul said. "You heard the Gospel, not just with your ears but with your heart in power, with the Holy Ghost and with much assurance. You became a follower. You became identified with the Lord and His people."

Then He said, *"You became an example."* Look at verses 7 and 8: *"You became an example to other people."* You did this in your attitude, your conduct and in your conversation. You became an example.

Not only that; you became a witness. My friends; let me show you three things:

There was a time when only God knew that you were His elect. There was a time when nobody knew that but God. You didn't even know it, only God knew. The Scripture says, *"Before I formed you in the belly; I knew thee. Before you came out of your mother's womb; I sanctified you and set you apart."* Paul said, *"God separated me from my mother's womb."* There was a time when only God knew that you were one of His elect.

Then the time came when you had Christ revealed to your heart by the Spirit of God and you knew that you were one of God's elect. You knew that you were a child of God. You knew that a work of grace had been performed in your heart. So, God knew it now and you knew it.

There came a time when not only you knew it but some folks began to recognize it. Now that you are a child of God, you want to glorify Christ in your life. You want to glorify Christ in your conversation and your desire is to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Do you know what the word adorn means? The word adorn in the dictionary means that you garnish something; you decorate it or make it pretty. That is what you want to do; you desire to tell others about Christ. You want them to know Christ. You delight to tell that the Lord Jesus Christ has done something for you.

My friends; true testimony is more than just words. True testimony is shown in love, in kindness, in patience, in gentleness, in faith and in peace. Our Lord has no secret disciples. He said, *"I know that you are God's elect because you heard the Gospel in power of the Holy Ghost and in much assurance. You became a follower."* You didn't go hide in a corner somewhere; you became a follower.

Not only did you become a follower but you became an example and a witness. You became a missionary. He said, *"I know that you are one of God's elect because you turn to God from your idols to serve the living God."* Yes sir; you turn from your idols!

You worship God in the Spirit; you rejoice in Jesus Christ and *“you have no confidence in the flesh.”* Believers do not worship calves of gold nor do they worship gold in another form as materialism or luxury.

Believers do not worship the relics of religion such as crosses, pictures, statues or men. They don't worship tradition, custom or creeds; they worship God. They turn from their idols. I am talking about all their idols.

I'm not just talking about the calves of gold or the idols that are formed out of clay. They turn from tradition and turn from customs and all these relics of religion and they worship God from the heart in the Spirit and in Truth.

The more paraphernalia a man has to have in his religion, the less heart knowledge he has of Christ. The more heart knowledge he has of Christ the less visible paraphernalia and gimmicks he has to have to love and worship God.

Last of all, He says; *“I know you are God's elect because you are waiting on His Son from heaven.”* Yes sir; He went away but not to stay. He is coming back again. *“This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go.”*

Believers are waiting for His return when He comes again to make all things new!