

## **And the Results of the Election Are . . .**

### **1 Thessalonians 1:2-10**

**August 31, 2008**

**FBC Waynesboro**

One of the chief characteristics in the life of every legitimate child of God is growth in Christlikeness in our character and our conduct that is rooted in our convictions and commitments that are being changed by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Growth produced by change is an unending constant in the life of every true believer. Every person who has ever come or will ever come into a right relationship with God through the surrender of life to the Lordship of Jesus always begins the same way. We are babies. All that we know at the beginning is that God has done a work of grace in our lives and changed us from living for ourselves in wanting our own way toward living for His glory and wanting His will to be done. All we know at the beginning is that something has happened inside us that has made a change us in relationship to the person of God, we want to love and serve Him; in relationship to the proclamation of God in His Word, we want to learn it and live it and in relationship to the people of God as we want to join with them in the praise of God and in the living out of His purpose in the world. We are just babies who are hungry and thirsty for the milk of the word and the manifestations of the Master in and to and through our lives. And from the moment that we are born into the family of God by faith, there is a constant that does not cease: we are being changed into the likeness of Christ by the Spirit of God and through the Word of God.

Theologians call this unending journey “sanctification.” It is the most certain evidence of our truly belonging to God. There is no salvation where there is no sanctification. There is no conversion where there is not the ongoing process of growth through change. No man or woman has truly met the master Jesus in whom there is not the very real and often very visible evidence of change in character and change in conduct due to change of convictions and change of commitments. In fact, the most important question that you will ever ask yourself is not when and where and how God changed you but what is the evidence in your life right here and right now that God is changing you? There are people who profess to be believers who would have to think a long time to generate answers to that question. So, where are the growth edges in your life today? What are the issues biblically and theologically with which you are

struggling? What are the evidences in your life that you are being changed even today by the Spirit of God and through the Word of God?

Growth in Christlikeness always happens in three areas that are interconnected and must not be separated: experiential growth, vocational growth, and theological growth. Growth in your experience of God, in the expression of the work of His Word in and through your life both of which are the direct outcome of God's engaging you in the depths of your life because of your devotion to His Word. The last of these three is the foundation for the other two without which a person is not and cannot be a believer. There is no experience of God that expresses itself in daily life apart from a deep devotion to the Word of God. I have people in our church come to me all the time and tell me how they just can't get enough of the Word of God. When they are reading it, they don't want to stop. When they are studying it, they just want to learn more and more and when it is being taught they just want more and more. Listen: that is a central characteristic in the life of every child of God. This not unique reserved for the elite in the family of faith; this is an identifying birthmark of every child of the Father. If we think that we can grow in the experience of God and in the expression of His presence in and through our lives without a daily engagement with His Word, we are deeply and dreadfully deceived. Prayer to God and fasting before God without feasting on the Word of God may lead us to the experience of something and someone, but it most likely won't be God. God grows us by changing us and the growth in our experience of God and the expression of that experience is directly related to the depth of our devotion to the Word of God and the way of God that is revealed in His Word. So, where is God calling you to change? Where is God challenging comfortably held convictions?

Let me just tell you about one area of my life where God has shaken me in recent years. The key verse in 1 Thessalonians 1 is verse 4. The word for knowing is a participle and it is a form of the verb for knowing that means "to know with absolute confidence." The word for "love" is a participle as well and is in the passive form so that the idea is that these believers in Thessalonica are giving evidence that they are the recipients of the love of God and that evidence is not just known as in common knowledge but it is known as in being made known every day and in all kinds of ways because these believers in Thessalonica are the elect of God. The word points to people who have been selected out by and chosen by God to belong to Him and to be used by Him to fulfill His purposes in

the world for His glory alone. They are chosen for salvation and for service, and the evidence that they are chosen is seen in their sanctification or in their being made more like Christ through the Word of God and the Spirit of God so that they can be more useful in service to God. The doctrine of election is simply the basic biblical truth that those who belong to God have been chosen by God from before the foundation of the world to belong to Him and to be useful to Him in bearing witness to Him so as to bring others to Him and to bring glory to God. It is the centerpiece of this first chapter. But it is not isolated to this one verse in this one chapter.

Let me just show you a few of the texts. We are going to probe very deeply this precious doctrine in our Sunday Night Studies but look at 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, Ephesians 1:3-6, Acts 9:13-16 and 2 Peter 1:3-11. We could go on travelling back into the Old Testament to establish the veracity and the validity of this precious truth of the Word of God. The precious truth of the doctrine of election declares that God knows who are His from before the foundation of the world because He has chosen them to be His, calling them to Himself through the proclamation of the Gospel, saving them by His grace and using them as His servants to advance the glorious Kingdom of God upon the earth and bring glory to the King. A text like Acts 18:9-11 does not make any sense if this doctrine is not true. But when I first saw this teaching in the Bible as the truth of God, it shook me. It showed me a picture of God in His greatness and grandeur that I had not yet seen. I saw the significance of the absoluteness and totality of God's sovereignty in a way that I had never seen before. My world was shaken yet again by the magnitude and the majesty of the Word of God.

I was overwhelmed by the reality that God knew me and knew me by name from before the foundation of the world. I was overcome by the majesty and the mercy of a God like this who would choose me as His own for no reason at all that would be related to me and for reasons that are hidden in the secret places of His sovereign plan and purpose and that this God would purchase my salvation on the cross at Calvary through the shedding of the blood of Jesus and then in God's own time by God's good grace, He would call me out and convict me of sin and draw me into the devotion of my life to Him and for Him forever. That is here too. Don't miss it in verse 5 and in verses 9-10. The doctrine of election does not in any way suggest that we are puppets upon a stage manipulated by some grand puppeteer so that our movements are without any freedom or any choice. The

greatness of our God in the way that He works in relationship to us stretches our language to its limits so that we are left to speak only in the powerful language of paradox as Paul does here and elsewhere. The elect of God are those who are chosen by God as His from before the foundation of the world and whose salvation is purchased at Calvary through the shedding of the blood of Jesus who when they hear the Gospel and are brought to new life by the Spirit of God through the Word of God exercise the gifts of repentance and faith to respond to the Gospel and see their lives changed. What is the alternative to this precious and sacred truth of God's Word? Well, it is what I believed although I had not seen it clearly and faced it completely until this precious truth of God pulled my world apart: it is that our being saved is completely up to us. It is our call. It is our choice. It is in our hands. What this implies makes a mockery of God and a mockery of the salvation of sinners, and has been condemned as heresy from the second century through the nineteenth century when in the west and particularly in our country it has been exalted as an art form for the growing of the church. It is the reason that Southern Baptists have far more on the roll than we do in real life. We have demonized the doctrine of salvation by dismissing almost entirely the doctrine of election. If salvation is completely in our hands and totally our choice to make anytime we are ready, then God does not know who or when or where. It implies that when Jesus died on the cross, He did so with the hope that some might believe or that all might believe or in the awareness that none might believe. The last of these eliminates the need for heaven, the middle one eliminates the need for hell. If none believe, the cross was a woeful waste and if all believe then why the cross at all?? All are saved by way of the cross in the sense that it is the only way that any will ever be saved not that all will be; only some will be saved. And the question of election is does God know who that is and if so, when does He know? Let me give you a far more urgent question: how do we know? How do we know that we belong to God?

The centerpiece of chapter one is verse 4. It is here that Paul proclaims the precious truth of the doctrine of election. But what is most important is what is found around the centerpiece where Paul gives us first the proofs of election and then shows us the power of election and the path of election. It is not without importance that Paul gives us the proofs of election before He proclaims the principle of election. Verse 3 comes before verse 4!! Paul gives us three proofs that are beautifully bound together as one. Faith, hope, and love. And to each he gives defining directive. A faith that works, a love that labors, and a hope that

perseveres. John Lillie a great nineteenth century preacher and theologian points us to 1 Thess. 5:8, Hebrews 5:10-12, Colossians 1:3-5, and 1 Corinthians 13 to show us how often Paul brings these three together and he reminds us that faith is the root that produces the fruit of hope and love. But this faith is a faith that works. It is trusting God alone for salvation that is manifested in the work of God being done in and through us. How do you know that you belong to Him? Because you hear Him calling you one day. It was as if He was talking just to you. He knew your name and your condition. He convicted you of your sin and where it was leading you and He was calling you to commit your life to Jesus. That is election. And the results are that you believed in Him and even today there is evidence in your life of His work in you through the works that He is doing through you. Do you see those results? Do others? I do know this: every time the Word of God goes forth, God is calling people to Himself even here today. Is He calling you?