

**Election****1 Thessalonians 1:2—4****Opening remarks** (verses 2—3)

Paul warmly regards the Thessalonians as his own children having brought to them the Gospel of the Grace of God followed by their acceptance and growth in the faith. Verse 9 shows this dramatic transformation having turned from dead idols in order to serve the living God. 1 Thessalonians 2:11 shows the depth of Paul's love for the Thessalonians, how he treated them as he would a son in guiding them so they would mature in the faith (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It is in this context that Paul is always thanking God for the faith of the Thessalonians; for out of their faith comes their work for the Lord, laboring out of a godly love while they patiently wait for the hope of their Savior, Jesus Christ. It must be noted that a Biblical hope is not one of wishing something would happen but confidently expecting something, knowing it will happen because God promised it. We can have absolute assurance (Hebrews 6:11) that we will at some time be caught up to be with the Lord for eternity because Paul (through the Holy Spirit) taught it and the Old Testament bears out God's nature as being completely trustworthy (Romans 15:4).

Notice Paul's use of the tri-fecta faith, hope and love. Scripture teaches that out of hope springs faith and love (Colossians 1:4—5). Without hope, what good is our faith and without hope our love for others seems pointless. Hope of a future with Christ drives us to strengthen our faith (sanctification) and constrains us to serve others in love. Without hope, life is futile.

**Election** (Verse 4)

There is much discussion and confusion surrounding the idea of election. To be elected is to be chosen. We understand this every time we go to the voting booth. Government officials are chosen through an election to serve us (although this is too often understood contrariwise by those elected). The Biblical definition of election is also about being chosen.

As Paul writes to the Thessalonians he almost casually points out that God has chosen (or elected) the brethren (believers). The standard Calvinist of today interprets this in light of 2 Thessalonians 2:13 to mean that all believers have been chosen before the creation of the world to be saved. Those who have not been chosen will not be able to get saved and will thus spend an eternity in hell. This is most likely the interpretation that most influences Christendom today.

Another school of thought comes from Jacob Arminius who took almost the opposite view stressing man's free will instead of God's sovereignty. He believed God chose some to salvation by looking forward in time to see who would become believers and proceeded to elect that group. Since God is driven by man's free-will it is only logical for Arminius to teach that man can lose his salvation by that same free-will.

To get a true picture of election we need to see how the Bible uses this word. Scripture describes a number of individuals or groups who were chosen by Him. Israel is called God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6—8; Psalm 33:12; Isaiah 45:4). In this case election was not about salvation since not everyone in Israel was a believer (Zechariah 13:8; Romans 11:26—27).

Jesus also chose all 12 Disciples after spending all night on a mountain in prayer to ascertain the will of the Father (Luke 6:12—16). Again, obviously, not all of the Disciples were believers for Judas became a traitor who profited in turning his back on Jesus (John 18:2—5).

Jesus Christ was also said to be chosen by the Father (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:18). Again, being chosen had nothing to do with salvation.

If election is not about salvation then what does it mean to be elect? Ephesians 1:4 gives some great insight about how Scripture uses this word. Here we find we, in the Body of Christ, were elect in Him before the world was created. Here's where almost all who adhere to Calvinistic doctrine misread this verse to have it state that we were elect TO BE in Him. Those two little words are inserted to conform to their idea that individuals were elect unto salvation. However, a careful reading indicates we were elect IN HIM. In other words those who were in Him (saved) were then elect.

The next logical question would be: "Why are we elect?" Ephesians 1:4 continues that the election would be for our holiness. Holiness means sanctification and indicates being set apart for service. Verse 5 expands on this by adding our holiness came through being predestined as adopted children. This adoption, according to Romans 8:29, is all about becoming conformed to the image of His Son. This brings us right back to sanctification. All these things pertain to the group called the Body of Christ.

To summarize, election is about service, not salvation. When a person believes, he becomes a member of the Body of Christ. All those in the Body of Christ have been elect unto sanctification, being set apart for service. Israel as a nation was also set apart to serve God whether or not the individuals were believers or not. The same is true of the 12 Disciples. Each Disciple served Jesus even though one was clearly a non-believer. This also explains how the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, could be elected since He was chosen to serve the Father.

Going back to 1 Thessalonians 1:3—4 there is a connection between the works of verse three with the election of verse 4. Paul speaks of their work of faith and labor of love...knowing His choice of them. Their work and labor cannot be why they were saved but it is directly related to being elected.

### **Problem verse**

Although interpreting election to be about service seems logical, there are a number of verses that appear to contradict this notion. It's beyond the scope of this lesson to go through every problem verse but it would be helpful to take a quick look at 2 Thessalonians 2:13. This verse is often used to show that we are elect unto salvation and on the surface this interpretation seems to make sense. However, an understanding of the context and a little bit of Greek will help us understand this verse's true meaning.

First, the Greek word used for chosen is different than in the other passages having to do with election. It is *haireo* (αἵρω) instead of *ekloge*. Both words can mean to choose but *haireo* means "taking for yourself." One of the root words (*anaireo*) means to take up or away. We would then understand this verse to mean God is going to save us by taking us up or away for Himself. This hints at the Rapture.

Now, let's look at the context. The Thessalonians were worried that they had missed the Rapture so Paul tells them about all the things that will transpire just after the Rapture. Paul then assures them that they will not go through the Tribulation because God has chosen those who are in the Body of Christ to be saved from this event. In context, being chosen for salvation means salvation from going through the Tribulation. This salvation is based on believing the truth of the Gospel (according to Paul) and therefore being sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

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