

# Themes in Gospel Life and Ministry

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Jesus. Amen. Well, I want to begin this evening by looking with you at maybe something of the background of 1 Thessalonians. In order to understand the book, the letter, why Paul wrote it, what his goals and purposes were in the writing of it, it's perhaps good to refresh our minds as to what took place not all that many months prior to the writing of this letter.

A church was planted in Thessalonica as a result of the visit that Paul, Silvanus or Silas and Timothy had made to that part of northern Macedonia in around 49 or 50 AD. The story of the planting of the church is told for us in Acts chapter 17. It was part of Paul's second missionary journey.

Paul and Silas began that journey and were later joined by Timothy in Lystra and then by a fourth member of their missionary team, Luke, who wrote the gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. He joined the other three in Truas. They had a very successful mission, first of all, in Philippi. You remember the call of the Macedonian man that they received and they concluded from that call, that vision that Paul had received during the night that God was calling them to take the gospel from Asia Minor, from modern-day Turkey across the sea to Europe and to Macedonia. And their expectations were more than fulfilled when God blessed the preaching of the gospel and their witness in the city of Philippi.

following that mission in Philippi, they moved in a southwesterly direction to Thessalonica. The city was founded in the, I think it was the fourth century BC, and it had a very strategic place, not only on the sea, but on the main road from Rome to the east. And in this city there was a sizable Jewish population because there was a synagogue. And Paul, as his custom was, went to the synagogue on the first Sabbath day of his sojourn in Thessalonica. And he preached the gospel in the synagogue, we're told, on three successive Sabbath days. And Luke gives us something of a summary of the message that he preached.

He took up the Old Testament scriptures, and from those Old Testament scriptures, he showed that the Messiah promised, had to suffer, had to die, and had to be raised again. And then he preached the Lord Jesus Christ. And I presume he would have dealt with the story, the gospel story of Christ's life, and his death, and his resurrection. And then the third strand to his preaching was that the Jesus whom he had proclaimed in his life, death, and resurrection was the Christ that the Old Testament scriptures had prophesied, that this Jesus was that Christ.

[ 4 : 11 ] The result of this ministry, remember, just three Sabbath days in the synagogue, was that some of the Jews were convinced of Paul's preaching and arguments, and they believed, as did a large number of the God-fearing Greeks. These were Greeks, not Jews, but who had attached themselves to the synagogue and had not gone the full way to become Jews, but respected and devoutly followed the teachings of the Old Testament scriptures. And we're also told that there was a third group who believed the gospel, not a few prominent, presumably Greek woman. Now, in the passage that we read together, in verse 9, we're told that the Thessalonians, generally speaking, turned to God from idols, which seems to indicate that many of them, perhaps the majority in this church were from a Gentile background. And so the summary that Luke has given us in the Acts, Acts 17 of Paul's time in Thessalonica was probably longer than the three Sabbath days that are recorded there for us. He could have been there for weeks or months, perhaps.

But it wasn't long after this period of time that some of the Jews who had opposed the gospel message that Paul brought to Thessalonica rented something of a mob, and a riot took place, and the mob attacked Jesus. And they were at Jason's house. Jason, who had, it seems, put Paul and his companions up during their stay in Thessalonica. They wanted to lay hands on them and to bring them out to the mob, and you can only imagine what may have happened had that taken place. But they couldn't find Paul. Instead, they brought accusations against Jason and others before the city's officials. And bail had to be posted for Jason and his companions. Meanwhile, the brothers were told were able to get Paul out of the city when night fell, and he moved on to Berea, another town not too far from Thessalonica. In Berea, he had a short mission.

Short because although these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, and you remember how they are commended for following Paul's teaching, consulting the Scriptures, making sure that what they were hearing was indeed in accordance with the Word of God. And many of them accepted the message, and it looked like things were going to go well there as well, until some of the Jews from Thessalonica, hearing that Paul was doing the same thing in Berea as he had done in Thessalonica, went down to make trouble for him. And at that point, Paul had to move further south. He went down to Athens. And while he was in Athens, he was anxious to hear how the work was progressing back in both Thessalonica and in Philippi.

So when Timothy and Silvanus joined Paul in Athens, not long after that, he sent them back up to Macedonia in order to find out how the believers were doing.

And presumably, we know Timothy went to Thessalonica and presumably Silvanus or Silas went to Thessalonica.

[ 8 : 51 ] And sometime later, Timothy rejoined Paul. By this time, Paul had moved from Athens, where he preached, you remember, to the Areopagus and Mars Hill.

He had moved further south in Greece to Corinth and had begun his ministry in Corinth when Timothy joined him.

How was the work going in Thessalonica? What message did Timothy have for Paul?

Well, he had good news and he had not so good news or bad news. The good news was encouraging. He spoke of their faith. He spoke of their faith. He spoke of their loyalty. He spoke of their constancy, their steadfastness under persecution.

The not so good news or bad news was that in the church, there were some who were criticizing Paul for his behavior, his actions.

[ 10 : 05 ] They were accusing him of insincerity. They were accusing him of having unworthy motives. And they were also blaming him for his failure to return to Thessalonica.

Timothy also shared that the Thessalonians were in need of further help. They needed correction. They needed instruction.

And we can draw this, can't we, from what we read in these two epistles that Paul wrote to them. They needed to have their sexual morality corrected.

They needed to be instructed in how to keep themselves busy earning a living and providing for the necessities of others.

They needed further instruction about the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how to live in a way that prepares for that future event.

[ 11 : 19 ] They needed further instructions on how to live and serve in the church. So this letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, after hearing this news that Timothy had brought him, can teach us so much.

It's a window, says John Stott, into the life and witness of a New Testament church during the days of the apostles.

It shows us how the gospel came to this town and how a church was established out of that gospel ministry.

It shows us what the apostles taught a young, fledgling church plant. It shows us the strengths and the weaknesses that are quite commonly found in young churches.

It shows us the theological difficulties and problems. It shows us the moral problems that existed. And it shows us also how a church, even with all its weaknesses, was still able to spread the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 12 : 47 ] In fact, it seems that the twin themes that run throughout the epistle are the gospel and the church. The gospel creates the church.

And the church that has been created by the gospel spreads the gospel. The gospel shapes and not only creates the church, it shapes the church as the church seeks to live a life that is worthy of the gospel that it has received.

I found in my brief time of preparation that John Stott's breakdown of the whole epistle is just so helpful in a study of it.

And if I had more time, I would have given Rob the headings to put up on the board. But if you're taking notes, you may want to follow these five divisions that will act as signposts to you if you want to read further through the five short chapters of 1 Thessalonians.

Christian evangelism is the first main heading. And that covers chapter 1, verses 1 to 10. Or, how does the church spread the gospel?

[ 14 : 26 ] That's what chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians can teach us. Secondly, Christian ministry, which runs from chapter 2, verse 1, to chapter 3, verse 13.

Or, how do pastors serve both the gospel and the church? That's what that section of the letter teaches us.

Then thirdly, Christian behavior. We see that in chapter 4 and verses 1 to 12. Or, how does the church live according to the gospel?

And then the fourth main heading is Christian hope, which is in chapter 4, verse 13, to chapter 5, verse 11. Or, how does the gospel inspire and motivate the church?

And then finally, point 5 or heading 5, Christian community, chapter 5, verse 12 to 28. Or, how does a church live like a gospel church?

[ 15 : 58 ] So that's something of the background and overview of the epistle. Let's now look at chapter 1 a bit more closely and the opening verses of the letter.

It begins with the men who authored the letter. Well, Paul was the author, but he wants to include in his salutation, in his opening remarks, his fellow workers.

He's an apostle. They are his fellow workers. Not apostles, but fellow workers and brothers in the Lord. But the three of them had been together in Thessalonica, and they were well known to the congregation.

And so, out of courtesy, the apostle embraces Silvanus and Timothy in the letter that he writes to the church. But they also, as John Angus reminded us this morning, Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, but he stood before the 11.

It was the message of the church. It was the one gospel. It was a unified voice that was addressing the crowd on that occasion.

[ 17 : 19 ] And the same message comes through in the way Paul begins this letter to the Thessalonians. The three men whom they knew so well stand together, and this is the gospel that they identify with, the gospel that they proclaimed.

And like any ancient letter, begins with a statement of the author, so you don't have to go to the end of the letter the way we do with letters today to find out who's written this letter to us.

The author is stated at the very beginning. Then, following that, there was a salutation or greeting, which in this case you see is the words grace to you and peace.

Grace and peace. Peace was the traditional Jewish greeting, the shalom, peace, the peace of God.

Not merely an absence of hostilities, but this rich concept of the blessing of God that provides health and prosperity in the right sense of that word.

[ 18 : 41 ] Peace with God, peace with one another. Harmony. All the things that lead to the blessing of the soul and ultimately blessing to the body as well.

And this peace comes to us through God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. God's undeserved favor. Shown to us, revealed to us, in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, that we might be reconciled to God, and that having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

But there are a few things mentioned here in these opening verses that teach us a lot about the nature of a true church of God.

And it's almost too easy to miss the first point that Paul makes in this regard.

Between his identification of the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, And those words, those words teach us a vitally important lesson about the nature of a true church of God.

[ 20 : 30 ] The church is rooted in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, it receives its source of life from God alone.

These words, remind us of two word pictures that the New Testament paints for us to describe the relationship between not only an individual Christian and God, but also the church, the gathering of individual Christians and God.

You remember how Jesus spoke in John chapter 15, this wonderful word picture of the vine and the branches.

He said that he was the vine, and he pointed at his disciples and said, You are the branches. The branch is vitally united and connected to the vine.

[ 21 : 49 ] That's how it lives. That's how it prospers. That's how it bears fruit. Broken off from the vine, it withers and it dies and is fruitless.

But it's united to the vine, and the life of the vine passes through each and every branch vitally connected to it. The branch is in the vine.

The church of the Thessalonians is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. By the way, isn't it amazing that just 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, it was the common faith of the universal church to have the Lord Jesus Christ equal with God the Father.

The other word picture that is painted in the New Testament is one that Paul gives us where he speaks about the body and the various limbs of the body and that organic unity that exists between the body and its various parts.

1 Corinthians 12. The limb broken off from the body again withers, perishes. But united to the body, the life of the body passes through each and every part of it.

[ 23 : 31 ] It's vital. It's life-giving. And this is the nature of the church. The church, in other words, is a divine and not a human institution.

And that's the way the church has to think about itself and all its activities and all its enterprises. The moment we lose sight of this and merely become another organization, whereby our quick wits or clever planning or quick thinking, we can extend our ministry and appeal to more people and have a greater impact on our communities or whatever.

We are on very dangerous territory. We have to remember that God planted this church in Thessalonica.

He planted this church in Livingston. Every true church of God exists because it is vitally united to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ comes our life and vitality and power. This is what gives the church its security.

[ 25 : 16 ] Safety. Safety. Its strength and power. Its stability and constancy.

And the church must, in the light of this truth, continually be sustained from this source or else it will wither and die.

There are many parts of the world, Scotland included, where there used to be churches, some of them good churches in their day, and now they are no more.

The history of the free church writes this lesson so very clearly. And you know, I was taking a new member of our staff on a little tour of ETS on Thursday, I think it was, this week.

And we went into Presbytery Hall and one of the things I love about Presbytery Hall in the free church offices is the writing around the, you can't really call it cornicing, but the beautifully decorated ceiling.

[ 26 : 40 ] And each of the texts that has been chosen by whoever designed that room was so gospel, so free church in the best sense of the free church.

And one of them says, one of these texts says, without me, you can do nothing. And if we really believed in that, if we really believed in that, and I know there are various reasons why we cannot all come to the prayer meeting every single week.

I know that. But, if we really believed this truth, would it not give us extra motivation, if motivation is needed, to come together to pray?

Because we realize that we are a church only as we are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving our life force from this vital union that we have with Him.

Is this not why Paul prays for them? Is this not why he asks them to pray for him? Because when we pray, we're saying, Lord, we cannot, but we believe with all our hearts that you can.

[ 28 : 18 ] Lord, the work is not ours. The work is the Lord's. You must do the work. What is Paul? What is Apollos?

What is Cephas? Just instruments, agents that God uses.

One may plant, God may use another one to water, but it's God who gives the increase. So the church is rooted in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second thing that this opening section of chapter 1 teaches us about the church is that it is distinguished, it is characterized, it is marked by faith, love, and hope.

Verse 3. Paul says that we give thanks to God always for all of you constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 43 ] Faith, love, and hope. These are all outward-looking graces.

Faith looks away from self and looks to God. Love looks away from self and looks towards others and their needs.

hope looks away from self to the future and in particular to the coming again of Jesus Christ to this world.

Faith rests on the past. Love labors in the present and hope steadfastly looks to the future.

But you'll notice that these three things that Paul mentions which are characteristic of a Christian and of a church made up of believing people are things that have practical applications or consequences.

[ 31 : 15 ] Faith works, he says. Love labors and hope produces steadfastness or endurance.

faith is more than a notion. It's more than simply saying, oh yes, I believe. But faith has this energetic active force about it that produces good works.

this is one of the little passages where you see there is absolutely no division between the apostle Paul and James.

You remember how James speaks about faith without works is dead? Paul is saying the same thing. Paul's focus is always on the faith that issues in works whereas James' focus in his letter because of the issue that he's dealing with in his letter deals with works that issue from faith.

So their emphasis is on a certain part of the equation but they are not contradictory. Paul is saying that the faith of these Thessalonian believers is an active energetic working faith.

[ 32 : 47 ] He also says in Galatians that faith works through love. Faith is more than a notion. It produces a certain way of life, a certain character that you can point to and say that person is a Christian because what he believes and how he lives are in harmony with one another.

Then love labors love. Sometimes we refer to a labor of love. It's something that we do because we love doing it. But this isn't the precise meaning of this phrase that Paul uses here to speak of the Thessalonians, labor of love.

The word labor speaks about the wearisome nature of the activity that this love is engaged in. It costs.

It is a burden. It causes weariness to the person who's laboring in love.

It also can refer to the amount of extraordinary effort that needs to be put in in order for the labor to take place.

[ 34 : 18 ] The size and magnitude of the task. But these Thessalonians had a love that was not just in name only.

It carried out its intentions at great personal cost. God. And then the hope that he speaks of here is that certainty, that certain knowledge and assurance that Jesus Christ is coming a second time to this world.

And that knowledge, that understanding of this certain future event inspires them to endure opposition, hardship, persecution.

They will go through anything because their eyes are fixed on what is most certainly going to take place. They see it. It's large in their vision.

Faith that works, love that neighbors, hope that inspires steadfastness and endurance. Is it any wonder Calvin described this part of 1 Thessalonians 1 as a brief definition of true Christianity?

[ 35 : 48 ] Faith, love, hope. Isn't it remarkable that in just a few weeks or months of ministry in this pagan city in northern Greece, a sizable number of people were so radically transformed by the gospel message.

They were no longer self-focused or self-centered. faith that works. They were God-centered. Faith that works.

They were focused not on their own interests but on the interests of others. Love that labors for others.

And you can imagine, and I think Calvin brings out this point, because of the difficulties involved in the founding of the church, the persecution that took place, the mob riot and all the rest of it, you can just imagine how difficult it must have been to be a Christian in those circumstances.

And yet here were people who were unashamedly followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and when one suffered within the congregation, they were there to provide help, practical help, support, comfort, encouragement.

[ 37 : 18 ] A love that labored in the best interests of others and far from focusing on their present needs and wants, they never let their eyes drop from that far horizon upon which by faith they could see the coming again of the Savior.

Archibald G. Brown, one of Spurgeon's close associates and fellow pastors and who succeeded to the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle some years after Spurgeon's death, once preached a sermon on words from Hebrews.

You know, by faith Noah saw the future judgment, the flood. And he entitled his sermon, Noah's telescope.

And that's what faith or hope in that sense is. It's putting up the telescope of Scripture to our eye, looking through it and seeing what we can't see with the naked eye.

The coming of Jesus Christ. We put Scripture to our eye like a telescope and we look and we can see clearly say, he's coming. He's coming.

[ 38 : 48 ] And these people seeing Christ coming in that sense were given strength to endure the opposition and persecution they faced.

Christ. And then the third and final thing we'll just look at in this passage is a wonderful truth that has been used throughout Scripture and church history to give strength to those who are weak.

And that is the church is loved by God and chosen by him. The doctrine of election.

look at verse 4 where Paul says, For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you.

And here Paul embraces again Silvanus and Timothy. He says, We know. Yes, we give thanks to God always for all of you constantly.

[ 40 : 02 ] So they together pray. Or individually they pray for these Thessalonian believers and remember them constantly in their prayers before God. But they also have this knowledge in common concerning the Thessalonian believers.

These young Christians, just a few months old. God, we know that God has loved you and that God has chosen you in eternity past.

How on earth do they know this? Surely, as Paul says in 2 Timothy 2 19, the Lord knows those who are his, but how do we know those who are his?

As one commentator says, does Paul and Silvanus and Timothy have access to classified files kept in heaven's secret storage container?

Have they peeped into the Lamb's Book of Life to see whose names are written there? No, these things are hidden and God alone knows.

[ 41 : 15 ] things are things are important to make a sense of life. There are telltale signs that give us sufficient information to draw a sound conclusion that so and so, or the members of a particular church, as in this case, have been loved by God and have been chosen by him.

It's not that Paul and Silvanus and Timothy saw their names written in the Book of Life. Only God can see that book at this point.

So how did they know that these people were the chosen of God? Two reasons.

One points back to verse 3, which we can summarize by saying they knew because of the holiness of the lives of these Thessalonian believers.

Who but a true Christian? And a true Christian is loved by God and chosen by him. We know that. who but a true Christian can have this faith that works, can have this love that labors, can have this steadfastness in the face of persecution that refuses to give up, refuses to give in, in spite of persecution.

[ 43 : 00 ] and then the second reason is in what follows in verse 5 where Paul says, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Christian, and he's not telling them anything that they couldn't remember, because he goes on to say, you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

You remember what happened. So, the holiness of life of these believers, coupled with the way the gospel came to them, with more than word, but with power and with the Holy Spirit and with this great sense of conviction.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy knew that these people, these believers, these lovers, these hopers, were the elect of God.

Scripture often raises this wonderful truth. It teaches it from the Old Testament right through into the New Testament.

[ 44 : 32 ] And whenever it teaches us about the doctrine of election, it does so to bring us assurance.

As here, remember this church has been established, newly planted, the believers are quite young. There's some encouraging things about the church there, but there's also some things that are of great concern.

Paul wants to encourage them, and he draws out this doctrine from his armory of encouragement to comfort them and to strengthen them for what lies ahead.

So, the doctrine of election provides assurance it doesn't and shouldn't ever lead to presumption. it's wrongly understood if it leads to that kind of thing.

When it is taught in Scripture, it produces holiness of life, not moral apathy, which couldn't care less about how one lived because we are the elect.

[ 45 : 55 ] We're going to be saved anyway. I remember back in Bible college, one of the things that you almost need therapy for when you finish Bible college is the experience you go through in sermon class.



And I remember preaching on sermon class on Colossians 3, and somebody who knew in Baptist circles in Ireland were not all Westminster confession people.

some are and some definitely aren't. But somebody accused me of over emphasizing the words in verse 12 of Colossians 3, put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

And above all these things, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And they said, you overemphasized chosen, God's chosen ones.

Well, you know, I didn't know whether I did or not, but if I did emphasize it, I think that was the right thing to do in that passage.

[ 47 : 24 ] Because Paul is saying, look, on this basis, that you are the elect of God, you have a responsibility to live in a certain way, and to encourage and develop these Christian graces in your life.

So far from leading to moral apathy, oh, I'm going to be saved no matter how I live, because I'm the elect of God. Far from it. As God's chosen ones, you are to live in this way, and if you don't live in this way, there is no evidence that you are the elect of God.

When Scripture teaches the doctrine of election, it leads to humility, not to pride. Can you remember that passage in Romans chapter 11 where Paul is speaking about God's mysterious dealings with Israel, who for a time have been partially blinded as the gospel goes out to the Gentiles throughout the world.

And he speaks about this olive tree with branches that have been broken off in order for other wild olive branches to be engrafted into the olive tree.

And look what he says in verses 17 to 21 of this passage. passage. But if some of the branches were broken off and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others, and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.

[ 49 : 14 ] If you are, remember, it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

So he's speaking about the doctrine of the election and the implication of God's sovereign ways. And he's telling these people not to be arrogant and not to be proud.

Election, truly understood, leads to humility. There was nothing in me, nothing foreseen that I might do in the future, that moved God to include me among the elect.

It was all of his sovereign, free grace, love, mercy.

[ 50 : 41 ] salvation, salvation is of the Lord. We owe everything to him, which is a great encouragement to us to pray for others.

God is able to save to the uttermost. God is saved. And if he saved a blasphemer like the apostle Paul, who was Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church, and was able to bear with him with great patience, this unlimited patience that Paul speaks about in his letter to Timothy.

me. And then he says, he holds himself up on what God has done in his life, and he says, this is an example of just how great, how far-reaching, how deep is God's sovereign grace.

And if he can do it with somebody like me, the chief of sinners, he can do it to others. If we really believed that, would there not be more prayer in our prayer meetings?

Maybe for people by name, mentioned. Lord, they are beyond our power to save. But you are able.

[ 51 : 59 ] You are able. Because your electing love does not depend upon anything good or foreseen in anybody.

And the doctrine of election, when mentioned in scripture, encourages zealous witnessing and evangelism. It does not result in lazy selfishness.

things. I think of that situation in Acts when the apostle Paul has moved to Corinth and is preaching the gospel in Corinth in Acts chapter 18.

And in verses 9 to 11, we read, God's read, and the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.

Well, Paul couldn't see them, but God could see them. And what did Paul do? Did it make him lazy and self-indulgent? Not a bit of it, for we read, and he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them, until every single one of those elect sinners heard the gospel, and by the power of the Holy Spirit came to faith in Jesus Christ, and began to live this kind of Thessalonian life.

[ 53 : 47 ] I also think of Paul's words in Acts chapter 26, on one of his many defenses before the rulers who had the power to release him or the power to put him to death, and in Acts chapter 26, and verse 29, he's before Agrippa, and in verse 29, he responds to this outburst that Agrippa thinks that, you know, in such a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian?

And Paul said, whether short or long. Now, listen to this. these are the words of an evangelist who believes in the sovereignty of God.

Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but listen to this, but also all who hear me this day.

No exceptions. He believed in the election of God. He believed in God's sovereignty. Yet he refused to think that anybody in the audience who were listening to his address, he refused to believe that some of them might not have been elect.

Instead, he hoped that they would all be the elect of God. and he preached with a hope that not only Agrippa, the king, but every single person in that room might become what he is apart from his genes.

[ 55 : 47 ] In other words, a Christian, follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes when we hear the doctrine of election mentioned, we automatically think of those who are not elect.

And something within our proud, sinful, fallen nature rises and says that's not fair. What was fair was God sending his angel with the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life and to banish Adam and Eve from the garden in the presence of God.

That's what was fair. election, says Spurgeon, is like a royal herald dressed in the finest of linen declaring in the name of his master that God receives sinners and that not because of anything good in them or foreseen to be in them in the future but all because of his master's good pleasure.

Sin shuts us out. God's electing grace opens the door and calls us to come. God's God's God's God's God's God's people like he did with Paul and Corinth, would we not renew our efforts to send the gospel out and with great patience and with careful instruction teach and preach and teach and preach in the confidence that not one of the elect will be lost?

Would we not with the apostle suffer all these things for the sake of the elect that they might obtain the salvation which we enjoy?

[ 58 : 05 ] So here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 is a church rooted in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ from which its life comes.

Here is a church that is characterized distinguished by a faith that works, by a love that labors, by a hope that produces steadfastness in the face of opposition and persecution.

And here is a church on what a glorious truth it is that has been loved by God and chosen by him and is therefore safe and secure.

May God bless these thoughts to us this evening. Let us pray. Our heavenly Father, we thank you that you have called us into the fellowship of your church.

And we pray that we might remember that our salvation and our participation in the church is all due to your love and to your grace.

[ 59 : 27 ] Where would we be this evening, Lord, had you not laid your hand upon us and taken hold of us and apprehended us and brought us into the fellowship of your son and united us not only to one another but to yourself.

Oh, that the fruit of the Holy Spirit may be more evidenced in our lives. love and your choice of the undeserving.

That we might be humbled yet motivated beyond measure to serve you with our whole heart in this glorious gospel of your son and our saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In whose name is