

Paul thanked God, knowing that the Thessalonian believers were elect. How was that possible? Paul reveals three factors to his assurance of their election, which in turn led to his giving thanks to God.

**I. *The character of God in election: His love (1:4)***

“Brothers” affirms Paul attachment to the Thessalonians and characterizes the family relation which all believers have with one another. “Loved by God” is particularly significant, emphasizing God’s past and continuing love for them. This quality of love is particularly associated with God’s choosing or calling of people for Himself.

God’s choice of some to be His own people is a sovereign choice, based upon His love, without respect for anything which they have done. Cf. Ephesians 1:4–5; Deuteronomy 7:6–8; 10:15; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Peter 1:1–2. Though we may never understand why God chose some and not others, it should motivate believers to live God-pleasing lives (Colossians 3:1–15).

God’s unconditional, sovereign love should be an encouragement and comfort. Assurance is not based upon measuring up to a certain standard. It is founded instead on a confidence in God, that He will accomplish what He has set out to do.

**II. *The character of the gospel message working in the messengers (1:5)***

God has not only chosen some, He has determined to save them through the preaching of the gospel. The gospel message and the missionary team’s personal experience with the gospel in their lives contributed further toward assuring them of the Thessalonians’ relation to God. Three qualities of the message were particularly important.

1. *A divine message:* “Our gospel” did not mean it was about the messengers or made up by the messengers. It was a proclamation about Jesus Christ which had been entrusted to them as stewards (cf. 2:4). Count on God to do what He has said. Understand and communicate well the gospel, because it is a divine message.
2. *A dynamic message:* God’s word is living and powerful. Although communicated with words, it is more than just words. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16). It is not an impersonal power, but wielded by the Holy Spirit who convicts, guides, comforts, and gives joy. The missionaries had experienced it and brought the message to the Thessalonians with full conviction. The message was true and was working in them with power.
3. *A demonstrated message:* The Thessalonians could see the gospel in action in the lives of the messengers. It was not merely what the missionaries felt, it was what others saw.

The gospel message at work in the messengers assured them that the message was the real thing and that those who truly received it would be truly saved. To be confident of one’s own salvation or another’s require confidence in the gospel message. It will also affect our evangelistic efforts.

**III. *The character of the transformation in the lives of those who received the gospel message (1:6–7)***

1. *They were transformed into imitators:* Imitation demands a life-style change. The Thessalonians particularly imitated faithful following of Jesus with joy despite persecution. Enduring persecution had been the pattern of the missionaries (cf. Acts 16:16–40) as well as the example of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21–23).
2. *They were transformed into models:* Believers throughout Greece could look to the Thessalonians as a pattern to follow. Though believers only a short time, they modeled faithful, joyful following Jesus despite persecution.

Paul understood this to be a work of God carrying out what God had determined in His choice of them and brought about by the gospel which had been proclaimed to them (cf. the parable of the soils). The transformation from idol-worshippers to enduring followers of Jesus Christ assured Paul that the Thessalonian believers truly belonged to God.

Assurance of one’s salvation, that someone is the elect of God, begins with assurance in God, then assurance in His message, and finally in faith being proven in life. For a helpful check on where you stand, consider the following questions. (The first is a classic question, frequently used.)

- If you were to stand before God today and He were to ask why you should be allowed in His presence, how would you answer?
- How is your life so uniquely Christian, that your family, neighbors or co-workers notice the difference?
- If a dying friend asked you what they had to do go to heaven, could you explain it with confidence? What would you say?
- How often do you thank God for those whose salvation is obvious?