

BELOVED AND CHOSEN

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Like wildfire, news about the believers in Thessalonica quickly spread all throughout the region. Although a young church, they became an example to fellow believers, pointing to the glory and power of the gospel. To use our modern language, the believers in Thessalonica went viral! To appreciate what took place in the life of this young church, it's helpful to pay attention to the first chapter of Paul's letter.

After Paul's introduction, he immediately affirmed the evident fruit of the gospel in their midst,

"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, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." - 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

As mentioned, although a young church, the believers clearly displayed the obvious manifestation of the gospel through their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. Then, in the following verse, Paul declares with certainty that they are loved and chosen by God. But how can Paul be sure of this?

Paul gives his first answer in the following verse, "...because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." - 1 Thessalonians 1:5a

For Paul, the power that accompanied the preaching of the gospel is a testimony that they were truly loved and chosen. The gospel was not proclaimed in mere words, but rather, it was done in the Holy Spirit, and thus, it brought forth this conviction that what they received was indeed the Word of God. Along with this, Paul went on to remind them of their integrity as bearers of the Word of God.

To put it simply, Paul was certain that they were loved and chosen by God because of the manner that the Word of God came to them. The word of God came in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction!

In the following verses, Paul elaborates further,

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit..." - 1 Thessalonians 1:6

The second reason for Paul's certainty that they were loved and chosen by God is because of the manner they responded to the Gospel. In this opening chapter, Paul highlights their transformation that came as a result of the gospel. They became imitators of Paul and of the Lord, and for Paul, this transformation indicates that the Lord was truly at work in and through them. In the same manner that Paul preached the gospel to them amidst affliction, they, too, exemplified the same

resolve to persevere with joy despite the challenges they faced.

For Paul, how the gospel came to them, and the manner of their response all point to the truth that they are loved and chosen by God. As believers all throughout the region testify about,

"the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." - 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

All can be certain that this was purely and completely because of the Lord's loving and choosing. If this was true for the Thessalonians, may this also be true for us. May we experience the power of the gospel, not as mere words, but with full conviction and in the Holy Spirit, and may this gospel cause us to truly be transformed into his image, and at the end of the day, may we declare that all is because of His loving and choosing. ✱

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