

The marks of the elect

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] First epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians. Chapter 1.

Reading from verse 4. And perhaps verse 4 might sum up our thoughts for this evening.

Knowing brethren, beloved, your election of God. Now, in the scriptures, there are many different names given for God's people.

So, whichever book of the scripture you go into, you'll find that the people of God are named under various names.

Just as the Son of God has scores of names. The people of God have also many names.

[1 : 21] Let me illustrate. Sometimes they're called the redeemed. Let the redeemed of God say so, the scripture says.

The redeemed. And of course that just means that they are a people whose salvation has been paid for by somebody else.

They've been redeemed. Peter says, they've not been redeemed with such corruptible things as silver and gold. And he tells us what they were redeemed with.

But by the precious blood of Christ. And so the people of God are called the redeemed. In another chapter of God's word, they're called the chosen.

God's own people, whom he personally chose. In Peter's epistle again, the people of God are called a peculiar people.

[2 : 27] Now, the word peculiar doesn't mean a strange people. It means a people who are different to the crowd.

A peculiar people. And when we speak of the peculiar people, we speak of God's people as a different people. A people of different ways of thinking.

Different ways of living. Different aim. All together. And they're called a peculiar people. And then, in the book of Acts, another name is the people who are being saved.

Not only the people who have been saved, but the people who are being saved. So they're called the saved ones. The ones whom Jesus has saved from their sins.

And that's another aspect of salvation. If you go to Romans, the people of God are called those who have been justified.

[3 : 33] Being justified by faith. Put legally right with God. So that no lawyer in heaven and earth can undo their right to live forever.

They're justified. And so, in each case, each name has a particular significance. And yet, each name is not complete in itself.

I want you to notice that. Now, here in this chapter that we've read, we have another name given by the apostle. It's often given in the scriptures for the people of God.

And it's this word, elect. And again, it's just another aspect. It shows another area of what it is to be a Christian.

And it's not complete in itself. It's only another aspect. And sometimes the people of God are called the elect. Now, what does the elect basically mean?

[4 : 46] Now, we've got to find this out. Because lots of people misunderstand and misinterpret, particularly this name for the people of God.

Well, I'll turn with you just to three scriptures to introduce this name. To be of the elect, the apostle says in Ephesians, is to be chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Those who are the elect, those who are the elect, those who are the elect.

That's the first thing that we find about the elect. The second thing we find about the elect, that I want to leave with you, is that they are those who have got particular mentions in Jesus' personal prayer to God in John 17.

This is what Jesus says. Now, listen. He says, He says,

[7 : 12] He says, He says, So there was to be others coming down through the years who would listen to the word of the elect and become saved and who would be part of the elect.

But God gave the elect to Christ before the foundation of the earth. And then the covenant of the covenant of the Trinity before time was when God, who was never taken by surprise, entered into covenant with his son.

It was to save in the covenant with his son. It was to save in particular the elect. And yet, from other parts of the covenant with his son. And yet, from other parts of the scripture, we find two other things.

One, there is sufficient in Jesus' atoning death for every sinner in the whole world from Adam to the last sinner.

Only Jesus says, Only Jesus says, A fearful and key statement. You will not come unto me that you might have life.

[8 : 36] The life is there. The offer of forgiveness is there. The offer of forgiveness is there. But the multitude will not come. Now God has children from the world, those who will come.

And they will be made willing to come in a day of God's power. Jesus then prays in particular for his own people, the elect.

And I say that there is sufficient in his atonement also for everyone. And two, everyone is invited to come. Nobody is excluded.

And yet, alongside this, there is this mysterious and deep and penetrating teaching about God's elect.

When Jesus was about to leave his earth, we read these words. Having loved his own, that way, in the world, he loved them to the end. His own.

[9 : 55] Now, here, in this chapter that we've read, Paul is now speaking to a group of people who have not long become Christians.

They don't know too much of the scripture. Their teaching is not, perhaps, deep and long.

But at the very beginning of his letter, he says to them, this is one thing you can know, my brethren. He says, you can know your election of God.

I know it. And so we find, at the very beginning of this chapter, the mystery and the wonder of God's sovereign choosing.

Some might say, that's a deep mystery. Yes, it's even deeper. Because when you turn to the epistle to the Romans, Paul speaking of Jacob and Esau.

[10 : 55] Jacob who was yet going to follow God. Esau who was yet going to turn away from God and lose his birthright. He says these words, the children not being yet born, not yet having done good and evil.

But the purpose of God according to election might stand. And then he said, it's not of works, but it's of God who calleth. In other words, our salvation at no level is dependent upon our work.

It's God who provides it. It's God who offers it. It's God who invites to it. And it's God who applies it. All that a sinner can do is ask God to do the saving.

He can do that. And if he's not too proud to do that, God will not refuse to save him.

Get this teaching of the elect, the people of God. I want to say this. It's never to be the foundation for fatalists to stand on.

[12 : 13] In other words, it's never meant in the scriptures. It's never put in the scriptures in such a way as a person can say, well, if I'm going to be among the elect, I'm of the elect.

I don't need to do anything. We'll find in a moment that this is not true. Election of God is always related to the word of God.

And those who are elect of God will believe in the word of God. And for any to stand on the platform of fatalism, that is sheer folly.

But the people of God, when they come to Christ, can then know they are of the elect.

For nobody knows that they are of the elect of God until they come to Christ. And the evidence that a person is among the elect of God will become manifest after they come to Christ as a sinner and not before.

[13 : 31] And so this evening, what I want to do with you, bearing this in mind, is from this chapter, to look with you at the marks, the characteristics of God's elect.

You see, in the word of God, and in the history of the church, we read about many who at different times in their lives might have professed to be Christians.

They might have said, I have decided to follow Christ. And they may have been genuine in measure at that time.

Well, the Bible looks for more than a person's decision. The Bible looks for the marks of those who have been wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, so that their whole nature wanted to decide for Christ and wanted to be saved by Christ.

And the Holy Spirit has put a stamp on those who are the elect.

[14 : 56] Let me look with you this evening then, and at myself, and see whether we have the marks of the elect of God. Because if we are not of the elect of God, and we don't have the marks of the elect of God, we would dare not claim to be the people of God.

And let me say this, that a profession of being a Christian, which is unaccompanied by the marks of God's elect, is not sufficient.

Now then, let's go on from there. Let's see how God puts his mark, and how God redeems his people, his elect.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we follow the marks through. And the first thing that God does in gathering in his elect is this.

And you find it in the first phrase in verse 5. For our gospel came, not unto you in word only, but in power.

[16 : 13] Now just at the beginning, you find the first mark. And the first mark of the elect of God is this.

That the word of God entered in to their understanding. First mark is the entrance of the word of God.

The word of God came. But a God who elects his people, also elects the way in which he will reach them.

So this word, the word of God came, is very important. It means that God has reached them with the word of God.

It was the gospel, the word. Two, God elected the method by which that word would be proclaimed, and he elected the person through which the word would be proclaimed.

[17 : 23] It might have been proclaimed through a preacher. It might have been proclaimed through the testimony of an ordinary Christian. It might have been proclaimed through a tract written or something read.

Or somebody putting the Bible into a person's hand. There are scores of ways in which the word comes. But God has not only elected that person, he's elected that they would meet him through the word, and he's elected in the way that the word would reach people.

And three, he's elected also the sovereign planning of various people's lives, so that they would be in a certain place at a certain time.

And another person would be able to say the right word at the right time. And another person would be able to water the word. And when you look at the whole pattern of it, you'll see the mark of God in scores of ways.

So often. Now, all to this end, that the gospel or the word would enter into that person's mind.

[18 : 51] There's nobody saved without the word of God. There's nobody saved without the proclamation of the word of God. And so those who are elect, first of all, experience the entrance of the word of God into their mind.

But you know as well as I know, that this church this morning had perhaps twice as many here as this evening. And many of those who came this morning, through the gracious providence of God, had the word of God entering into their minds.

There's no doubt about that. And the fact that the word of God has reached people's minds, will ultimately be a great part in their damnation.

It will be something that they will be judged for. That they knew the word, and that they rejected it. But that's not what we're on this evening.

What I'm saying this evening is that in everyone who is of the elect, God elected the word, He elected the means, the person who was going to proclaim it, and He sovereignly elected many other things, so that that person would be in a certain place at a certain time, thinking a certain way at a certain time, wanting a certain thing at a certain time, needing a certain thing at a certain time, disillusioned at a certain place at a certain time.

[20 : 33] And there are hundreds of things that God elected, to ensure that those whom He had elected to salvation from before the foundation of the earth, would have this first mark, the entrance of the word into their minds.

Now when that took place, you come to the second mark. Because there are many people who have had the word of God, and yet it hasn't, we would say, taken root in their minds.

And so, the second mark of God's people, is not only the entrance of the word, but the enlightenment of the word.

Let me read it to you. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, not just in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

Now, not only then do we have the entrance of the word, but now we have the enlightenment of the word. The Bible teaches us that man is both dead in trespasses and in sins, and that he is spiritually blind.

[22 : 17] Now, through the word of God, coming into the word, we find that with the elect of God, the word of God does not just come as the word alone.

It comes as the word accompanied with divine action. And the apostle uses three terms here for the enlightenment of the word.

First of all, he says, it comes in power. What does that mean? It means that it is applied to the mind with sufficient potency, sufficient potency to do three things.

First of all, to break down unbelief, and to bring that person to faith.

Now, many people hear the word, and they remain unbelieving. The word has not come in power.

[23 : 33] It hasn't broken down unbelief. It hasn't done three things. It hasn't subdued the stubborn will of man.

It hasn't conquered the heart of man. And it hasn't, we may say, quite simply, enlightened the mind.

Now, when the word comes to God's elect, it always, first of all, comes with potency, with authority.

And it, when it comes with potency and authority, we read, it breaks down all the unbelief that's in the human heart.

And it brings a person to faith in the very word that's come in. You see what it means? Up until that time, the word of God may be generally believed.

[24 : 40] But when the word comes with power, it's believed in a particular way. The word itself brings the ability to have faith in it, so that the person believes in that word with all their heart.

And before that happens, this power that's in the word has got to enlighten the mind, so that the darkness is taken away, and the child of wrath sees now as God sees.

He knows now in measure as God knows. And he knows, and he feels, and he's sure in his own being that everything in this truth of God is true.

You see, his mind is enlightened, and truth breaks in in waves. And he's brought to faith in the word of God.

And then as the truth of God, the word of the gospel is brought, his heart, the emotional part of him, is gripped. First of all, perhaps, by the doctrine of potential punishment, the heart of God sees.

[26 : 01] And then by the grace of God, when the word of God in the gospel shows on the cross, that person sees Christ dying for him or her, and all of a sudden that person has the capacity to love the Lord Jesus.

To love him. To know that he's the Messiah. To know that he's the Son of God. To know that he came from above to die for them. And the mind being enlightened, and the heart being captivated, then this word of God burrows through to the human will.

And the will that was polarized in self-preservation, and self-protection, and self-enjoyment, that will now is broken, and it is surrendered to Jesus Christ, so that the man has now no will of his own, that he is not placed under the authority of the God who made him.

And so we find that the elect are those of whom it is said, the word of God has entered their minds, and the word of God has come in with sufficient power to break down unbelief, to bring them to faith in the very word itself that's coming in, to enlighten their minds so that they grasp it, to touch their heart so that they feel it, and to touch the world so that they are cowed before God, and now willing to do his will.

Now that's what it means for the word of God coming in power. But there's more than that, the apostle says here, the enlightenment of the word is that it comes in power and does that inside a person, but then it comes also in the Holy Ghost.

[28 : 10] What does it mean in the Holy Ghost? It means that the Holy Ghost brings the word in and gives power to the word.

But more than that, to receive the enlightenment of the word in the Holy Ghost is to bring to the personality, to this personality that was so devoid of God, so empty of God, so antagonistic towards God, by, by, some miracle, it brings to the personality a new inner consciousness of God, an inner consciousness of God, a new inner reverence for God, a new inner trust in God.

And so when the word then comes in the power, and when it comes in the Holy Ghost, it does these things, so that the person now has an inner consciousness of God, an inner reverence for God, an inner trust in God.

And then the apostle says, at that time too, it comes with much assurance, the third thing, so that there is a total conviction, total conviction by God.

The person is totally convinced by the power of God, as to the being of God, as to the word of God, as to the promises of God, as to the salvation of God, as to the warnings of God, as to the heaven of God, and as to the hell of God.

[29 : 56] There is a conviction by God, and at the same time, there is a commitment to God, to God himself, not to the church, not to the fellowship, but to God.

You see, this word coming in enlightening power, makes a person God conscious.

And this is one of the marks of the elect. It's not that the elect think that they're safe for heaven. They know that they're safe for heaven, because they're the children of God.

And they don't look upon their time in the world here, as a spell in which they've got to wait, to fill in, to do what they like, until they get to heaven. Or to do as little for God as they can, while they're on their way to heaven.

No, my friends, that's not the marks of the elect, who've tasted the enlightening power. Those who know the enlightening power of God, have had their unbelief broken down, and have been brought to faith in God.

[31 : 09] Their mind has been enlightened, and so they see the things of God. Their heart has been kept, so they love the things of God, and want the things of God, and are determined to have the things of God.

And their wills have been kept, so that they are not only determined to have, and they love, but they're going to do the things of God.

And then when it comes in the Holy Ghost, they're conscious of God. They have this inner consciousness. They have the peace of God. They have the fear of God.

They're responsive to the voice of God. And then they have a trust in God. And they have a reverence for God. And this mature humans then, makes them totally convinced by God, and totally committed to God, so that from that moment of this enlightenment, they belong to God.

That's the second mark of the elect. Now then, what comes thirdly? We've said there's the entrance of the word.

[32 : 23] And then there's the enlightenment of the word, when it comes in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. Now then, thirdly, we see the effect of the word of God, in the lives of those pagan people at Thessalonica.

What are these effects of the word of God? Well, there's four effects. When the word of God comes this way, there's four things begin to happen. And it's happened in every belief.

In every epistle that you read, you'll find these four things. They put very simply in this epistle, the first thing is that they turned to God from idols.

Verse 9. They turned to God from idols. In other words, they, from that moment, became divinely orientated.

Their, the sun in their sky now, is not themselves. Or substitute for God, whether it be family, whether it be money, whether it be pleasure, whether it be ambition, whether it be ungodly gain, whether it be lust.

[33 : 44] In their sky now, their sun is not themselves, or their idols. But their sun, their light, their all, is God.

They turned to God. They turned to God. To God who felt. To the Creator. To the Great I Am. To the One who has no beginning and no end.

And they're not fanatic. They have now come to God by the way of the cross. By the way of His own Son's atonement. They've had their sins forgiven.

That their whole nature now, is God orientated. They turned from idols, to the living God. They got their priorities right, from the first, for the first time in their, in their whole lives.

And the effect of the word of God is, that they turned to God from idols, and they recognized the idols, and they put them away. Two.

[34 : 45] We read this. They turned from God from idols, to do what? To serve the living God. And so, what they do now is, they voluntarily enter into spiritual slavery.

And they personally surrender all their rights. It just takes a miracle. To enter into a spiritual slavery to the Almighty. To surrender all your own rights, of what you want to do with your life, and how you want to live it.

And where you want to go. To surrender it all to God. To tell you how to live it. To tell you where to go. To help you on the road. This is an entrance into service.

Now, when you go, if you are young, and you go to university, you go to university for six years. Apprenticeship to become a doctor. Or four years to become a teacher.

Or if you're a minister, you go in for six years. If you're a plumber, you go in for three or four years as an apprentice. My friends, when a Christian enters into fellowship with God, they enter into an apprenticeship where he will be Lord over them for the rest of their life and the whole of their eternity.

[36 : 09] And the effect of the Word of God will be to produce this. Not only will they turn to God and become divinely orientated, but they will voluntarily enter into a joyous spiritual slavery and leave the rest to God.

The third thing in the effect of the Word in God's elect is this. They became followers of us. They did two things if they became followers of us.

The apostle will tell us this. That they entered into a Christian fellowship of believing like-minded people.

And they entered into an accepted Christian life pattern. They entered into a fellowship of believing Christian people. They followed us.

Because those who had taught them knew more than they knew. And they humbly learned from those that knew more than themselves. But not only did they follow us and enter into a Christian fellowship of believing people, they also accepted a Christian pattern of living.

[37 : 25] You have that written down here. That was the third effect of the Word of God. Now the fourth effect of the Word of God is this.

You became examples to all. They became living demonstrations of what they believed. Are you and I a living demonstration of what we believe?

Is it that important to us? You see, too much in the Christian church today is insurance policy. We've got to get saved, brother, till we get to heaven.

And if we're on the way to heaven, we're all right. It doesn't matter one hoot what we do when we're on the road to heaven. As long as we live reasonably, respectably. As long as we go to church regularly.

As long as we attend the prayer meeting. It doesn't matter how else we live. No, my friends. That's not what they did at Thessalonica. The effect of the Word was they turned to God from everything that was idolatrous.

[38 : 32] They entered into voluntary spiritual slavery under God as their master. With no rights of their own. They entered into a Christian fellowship and shared in it and gave everything to it.

And they followed the pattern of that Christian fellowship. And in their own spiritual pouring out of themselves. We read they became living demonstrators.

They became examples, examples to everybody. Now that was the effect of the Word in God's elect. See it now? The entrance of the Word.

Then the enlightenment of the Word. God making it ignite. And then the effect of the Word.

Fourfold. That's not the end though. The next mark of God's elect is the effusion of the Word. The Word poured out from them.

[39 : 35] We read. Listen. For in verse 8. For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord.

Now he's not speaking to apostles here. He's not speaking to elders. He's not speaking to pretty, shall we say, well-armed Christians.

This is a letter to the whole church. And it would seem that the whole church were sounding out the Word of the Lord. And so you find three things here under this head.

From you sounded out the Word of the Lord. Are you sounding out the Word of the Lord as a Christian? Here we find evangelization by the individual.

To evangelization by the fellowship. Now despite the mockery. Despite the scorn.

[40 : 38] Despite the difficulty. Despite the shame. Despite the unworthiness even of themselves who sounded it out.

The mark of the elect of God was that they couldn't keep it in. You had to tell these people to go out and evangelize.

We must speak the Word of God. And one of the marks of the elect is this. The effusion of the Word.

The Word sounded out. Now the Word that sounded out was not just a testimony with regard to their conversion. I'm sure that they sounded out that.

They said the Lord met with me. But really what really sounded out from these people of God was not just the ground of their conversion. Or the story of it.

[41 : 39] But the ground for their conversion. The biblical grounds on which they had met with God. It was the truth of God. And it sounded out from them.

That was the fourth thing. In the marks of God's elect. You know there's a cheap way of thinking. That if one makes a profession of conversion.

And one comes to the Lord's table. And one becomes a member of the church. One is automatically of the elect. Particularly if you believe all the evangelical truths that you're taught.

But no. Not in this place. One of the marks is the effusion of the Word. The sounding it out.

Not just the irrelevante. That's important. But sounding it out everywhere. What did they sound out?

[42 : 38] Well we find the next mark of the people of God or the elect is that they have a good group of the elements of the Word. They sounded out the Word.

And you find in this chapter the elements of the Word that they sounded out. What are they? They told people about the living God. That the God that they worshipped was alive.

That he was looking down upon them. That he knew what they were doing. That he looked into their hearts. That he saw them inside and out. That God was not a figment of imagination. But he was a living power force.

He told those that were round about of the living God. They did more than that though. Listen. They said, You turn from idols serving the living and the true God.

And to wait for his Son from heaven. They told them about the enthroned Christ. Who had ascended.

[43 : 45] And who was coming back. They sounded out the word of the enthroned conquering Christ of Calvary. The one who conquered death.

And the one who was sitting on his Father's throne. Until the time in his Father's plan when he would rise from the throne. And gather his angels together. And come back, he said, to wait for his Son from heaven.

That was the things that they taught. Even Jesus. Even Jesus. Even Jesus. That same historic Jesus. Who walked the streets of Palestine.

His Son from heaven. Jesus. That was the element of the word. And then, it was from heaven. The resurrection.

They preached the resurrection. Even Jesus, they said, who delivered us from the wrath to come. So there are two other elements that they preached.

[44 : 48] One. They preached redemption. How Jesus delivered them. And two. Not only did they preach how Jesus delivered them.

But they preached the wrath to come. The wrath to come. Until you find that the elements of the word of God that they sounded out.

Were the living God. The enthroned Christ. The coming Christ. The historic person of Jesus. The resurrection.

Redemption. By the cross. And the wrath to come. Now these were just a pagan people. Whom the word of God gripped. They were the elect.

And they had the entrance of the word. They had the enlightenment of the word. They had the effect of the word. They turned from God themselves.

[45 : 52] They then had the effusion of the word. They poured it out. And they had the elements of the word to pour out. That's the elect of God. A massive people.

And then we read that not only that, but they were the embodiment of the word. Your faith to God's word is spread abroad.

Your faith. They were what they preached. They were recognized as true. They were recognized as true. They were in the embodiment of their message.

They had the marks of the genuine. Now these are the marks of God's elect. God has a people. But they have characteristics which are of God.

They have the marks which bear the imprint of the work of God inside them. And when these marks are there accompanied by their profession.

[47 : 01] They have this certainty. That because these marks are there. They are the elect of God. Not for any goodness of their own.

Not for any righteousness that they've done. Not because they've got deeper faith than another people. Because the elect of God have got distant grades of faith. But they all have a measure of these marks.

The word has come to them. Yes. The word has enlightened them. The word has effected them.

The word is poured out from them. The elements of the word are known by them and loved by them. And the word has its embodiment in them.

That's real Christianity. May God help us to see and to examine ourselves. To see whether we have or whether we haven't.

[47 : 58] The marks of God's elect shall we pray. The words of God. Our gracious God. Bless thy word to us this evening.

May we be taught by it. May we see how enriching it is. May we not be satisfied. Unless we like Paul.

Bear spiritually on our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus. As he did literally. For Jesus sake.

Amen.