

I THESSALONIANS 1:3-4
A LABOR OF LOVE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God. And as we saw last time, Paul established the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. And Thessalonica was a prosperous capital of the province of Macedonia or Northern Greece and it was located on the famous Egnatian Way.

And here in I Thessalonians chapter 1 we see the focus on how this church was born, it is a look at the church in Thessalonica. We saw the introduction last time in I Thessalonians 1:1-2. This morning we will be looking at this labor of love in I Thessalonians 1:3-4. From there we will look at the Gospel power in I Thessalonians 1:5-6. And then we will be looking at a two-part study on their Godly witness in I Thessalonians 1:7-8 and then I Thessalonians 1:9, their present life in Christ and their past life apart from Christ. And we will finish up this chapter looking at the hope they had in the return of Jesus in I Thessalonians 1:10.

And we closed last time with these words of Paul, “**We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.**” I Thessalonians 1:2. Paul gave thanks to God, he prayed for these faithful believers in Thessalonica like he did with all the churches he established or came in contact with!

But what did he give thanks to God for regarding these believers? As we will see this morning, there are three things that were produced in the lives of these believers that Paul thanked God for. They are,

1. ***YOUR WORK OF FAITH!***
2. ***YOUR LABOR OF LOVE!***
3. ***YOUR PATIENCE OF HOPE!***

That is what we will focus on this morning and we will then finish up looking at election! I know, how in the world are we going to finish up with this idea of election? That has been a topic that has been discussed for a long time and we still are debating it!

Here's the thing. I think we make this too hard to understand. Let me put it like this, we are not going to fully understand it and thus, the problem comes when we try to figure it out with our finite minds and we refuse to believe it by faith!

I hope I can show you what election is about and answer some of those questions you may have because this is a hot topic once again.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 1 and look at verse 3. And let's pray that the Lord opens up His Word to our hearts and minds this morning and that we would apply these things to our lives.

I THESSALONIANS 1

VERSE 3

As Paul heard all that the church in Thessalonica was doing, he simply could not forget these things. He was blessed by them. He was thankful for them. And the first point that Paul was blessed and thankful for was that these believers had this ***WORK OF FAITH*** attitude!

Now that is interesting to me because Paul often spoke of how faith and works don't go together. Let me give you some examples. In Romans 3:27-28 Paul tells us, "**Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.**" That is pretty clear. We are not saved by the Law or good works, but by faith!

Here is another one. In Romans 4:5 we are told, "**But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.**" I know, you are thinking that I am not making my case for my first point. Hold on, I will show you how this works out.

Let me give you just one more and that is in Galatians 2:16 where Paul tells us, "**knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.**"

I know, you are thinking I just put the last nail in that coffin and there is no way to get out of this one! Hear me out on this. We are not saved by the Law or good works, we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Listen to what we are told in John 6:28, "**Then they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?'**" And please understand this is the cry of those who are seeking God, "What must we do to get to God? What must we do to get to heaven? What work does God desire of me?"

That is what they were asking and listen to how this is answered in John 6:29, “**Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’**” Please understand that the work that Jesus speaks of here in John is not a works salvation. In fact, He tells us that the work is “**that you believe.**” What is Jesus saying? He is saying that our salvation is based upon faith in Jesus, that He died for our sins and our salvation is not built upon my works or the keeping of the Law!

You see, we don’t do anything for salvation but believe! Paul said in Romans 6:23, “**For the wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Notice, it is a free gift of God. It is not something we earn and God owes us but it is a grace gift. Something we don’t deserve but God gives us eternal life with Him when we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of our lives!

So again, the question is, “*Are faith and works mutually exclusive?*” Well, yes and no! And I am not avoiding answering the question here or taking the easy way out by being vague with that answer.

For salvation, absolutely works and faith are mutually exclusive as we have seen. You can’t work your way into heaven. You can’t be good enough to get into heaven because God demands perfection and we miss that by millions of miles. All you can do is receive that gift by faith!

Remember what Jesus said regarding the work of God, “**that you believe.**” Again, that is for salvation and faith and works are mutually exclusive here.

But that is not what Paul is speaking of here in I Thessalonians. He is not talking about our salvation but the good works we do because we are saved! Listen to what Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-10, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

First of all, in regards to our salvation, it is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and Paul tells us, **“not of works, lest anyone should boast.”** I think that is very clear. But then he says, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

Here is the wonderful thing regarding what faith produces in our lives. Paul tells us that faith produces work because without it our faith is empty, it is dead.

James put it this way in James 2:14-18, **“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”**

As some read this they have a hard time with what James is saying compared to what Paul is saying. But they do not contradict each other. Paul is saying that we are saved by faith and James is saying that works is born out of that faith!

And what we see here in James is that he is speaking of a person who is all talk and there is no walk, this person has not put legs to his faith and the reality is, they are not saved! In James 2:26 we see James make this point as he wrote, **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”**

Think of it like this. If I told you there was a bomb in this building that was to go off in just 2 minutes and I said that I was 100% sure of this happening but then I just continued talking, saying, *“And in conclusion . . .”* and you know I have at least 15 more minutes to go, and I am not running out of the building, then my faith is empty, it is not real because my actions reflect that. Faith alone saves but a saving faith is never alone, it is reflected or manifested in our actions, the things we do!

As we saw in Ephesians chapter 2, we are saved by grace through faith but then that saving faith is worked out in our lives. It is seen in the things we do. How do I know that? Remember what we read in Ephesians 2:10, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

Also, notice what Paul says in Titus 3:8, **“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”** May our faith in Christ be manifested in our outward actions as we minister to people, as we show them the love of Christ!

Listen to what the seventeenth-century English Preacher Thomas Brooks wrote regarding this issue. He wrote,

Christ hath freed you from all your enemies, from the curse of the law, the predominant damnatory power of sin, the wrath of God, the sting of death, and the torments of hell; but what is the end and design of Christ in doing these great and marvelous things for his people? It is not that we should throw off duties of righteousness and holiness, but that their hearts may be the more free and sweet in all holy duties and heavenly services. . . . Ah, souls! I know no such arguments to work you to a lively and constant performance of all heavenly services, like those that are drawn from the consideration of the great and glorious things that Christ hath done for you.

- Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, Banner of Truth Trust, 1984, pp. 123-124

Thus, if our faith is living, if it is real, then it will have life to it, it will be seen in the things we do for people. So we believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and out of that relationship comes good works!

Genuine saving faith is by definition powerfully inclined toward obedience to God, which leads inevitably to the work of faith Paul commended the Thessalonians for. ***THE WORK OF FAITH!***

The second point that Paul was blessed and thankful for was that these believers had this **LABOR OF LOVE** attitude! This is kind of funny to me because I hear people talk or post on Facebook on how on-fire they are for the Lord, that they are serving the Lord and I am thinking, “Stop patting yourself on the back and work!” And it almost seems that it is not a labor of love but a labor of burdens and thus, the complaining about this person not doing this and that person not doing that! They have missed the whole point that Paul is bringing forth here.

First of all, let me say this because we do see this often today in the church. Paul did not say that this is a **LABOR OF SELF-LOVE!** As hard as that may be to swallow, Paul said that it is a **LABOR OF LOVE!**

And the Greek words that Paul uses for “**labor**” and “**love**” show us that it is not about us, this service we are doing, it is about others. Let me show you what I mean.

Paul starts out with the word “**labor**” and he uses the Greek word, KOPOS (kop’-os). This work speaks of toil, pains, it “implies toil that is strenuous and sweat-producing.” We are teaching Christians today that they are kings to be served and not servants to serve, and thus, a few people do the church work.

There are more spectators than players and there should be no spectators in the body of Christ! We are very blessed here at Calvary Chapel as so many are involved in service here. And for those who have health conditions and they feel they are not serving, many of them are prayer warriors and praise God for their service.

And we also see this. Some feel if you are working for the Lord and you are sweating, then it is not of God. You are working too hard. When you serve the Lord it should be a piece of cake or it is not of God. That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard and I would tend to believe that the person who feels that way is just plain lazy.

Listen to what Paul did as he served the Lord, the things he faced, **“Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”** II Corinthians 11:23-29.

May we have that kind of service unto the Lord ministering to others!

Next, Paul speaks of **“love”** and he uses the Greek word AGAPE which speaks of unconditional love. It is a love that is not based upon feelings or that the person deserves it, but it is freely given no matter what!

And Paul saw this in the church in Thessalonica, they had a love that caused them to labor, to work hard for the Lord, ministering to the body of Christ. If your labor is not done out of love, then it won't last, you will stop, drop out, do nothing because you are doing it for the wrong reasons!

Now what happens many times is we see Christians who complain about their service to God and it becomes a heavy burden for them. Thus, it is not a labor of love any longer. I am not saying that we don't get weary in the work, the work is strenuous but as we serve the Lord we do so with a labor of love and not a burden of love!

One time when Dwight L. Moody came home, his family said to him, “Cancel your next meeting. You look so weary and we know you are tired.” He gave this tremendous response, “I am weary in the work, but I am not weary of the work.”

That truly is what Paul is telling us here. The work is strenuous, it is sweat-producing, we are toiling in the work but we are not weary of the work of God that we are doing because to us, it is a labor of love.

Now, if you are struggling in this area I want to give to you the remedy. And it is not more work, it is worship. Listen to what happened in the lives of two sisters in Luke 10:38-42, **“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’ And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’”**

This is the story of two sisters, Mary and Martha. Mary served the Lord and so did Martha. But for Mary, there was one thing that was more important than service and that was sitting at the feet of Jesus and receiving from Him. You see, it was not that Mary did not serve the Lord, she did but she also took the time to worship Him, receive from Him, hear His Words!

But for Martha, she worked, and worked and worked and since she did not spend the time to worship the Lord, sit at His feet and learn from Him, she not only worked, worked, worked, but she also complained, complained, complained!

In fact, she is so upset with her sister Mary that she rebukes Jesus and says to Him, **“Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”** I don’t know where you are at this morning, if you are more of a Mary or Martha, I think we all go through periods where we act like both of them. But may we learn the lesson from Mary, what was important to her, her worship of the Lord, sitting at His feet!

In response to what Martha said, we see Jesus tell Martha, in fact, He calls her by name twice, which is never a good thing, He is trying to get her attention, and Jesus says to Martha who is complaining, **“Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”**

I find that interesting. Mary is resting at the feet of Jesus, worshiping Him and what is Martha doing besides working? She is worried, she is troubled about all kinds of things and that will happen as we focus on the work instead of the Savior. We need to take that time. Jesus died to restore that fellowship with God the Father that was broken by sin. He wants to spend time with you, with me!

So how much time do you spend with the Lord? Let’s put that into perspective. If the time you spend with the Lord is the same amount of time you spend with your spouse, how do you think that relationship would be? Not good! How important is the Lord to you? If He is important you will take that time to spend with Him and receive from Him!

May we learn from Mary who not only served the Lord but that service unto the Lord was born out of her relationship with Him and she was not worried, she was not troubled and she served the Lord with joy and not complaining!

If you have a ministry of complaining about what others are not doing, like Martha, I would ask you to step back and sit at the feet of Jesus, worship Him, receive from His Word and it is out of that you can serve Him in love and serve others with the love of Christ!

Apart from that relationship, that worship of the Lord, it is difficult and will eventually become impossible to serve Him with love.

Let me show you how this is played out for us with this true story. We are told,

During his visit to the Boys' Town orphanage in the 1940s, a reporter for Life magazine observed a ten-year-old boy carrying a much older boy on his back.

"Isn't he heavy?" asked the reporter.

"He ain't heavy," replied the younger boy. "He's my brother"- giving rise to the song that would later be written about this true story.

It's not a burdensome obligation, but a labor of love that says, "God's been so good to me that I can't help but carry someone else."

- Jon Courson, Jon Courson's Application Commentary, p. 1330

Authentic Christianity has always been defined by loving Christ and it is out of that we can have this labor of love. It is as Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:14, "**For the love of Christ compels us . . .**" These Thessalonian believers not only had this *WORK OF FAITH* but also, they had this *LABOR OF LOVE!*

The third point that Paul was blessed and thankful for was that these believers had this *PATIENCE OF HOPE* attitude!

The word, “**patience**” speaks of endurance, continuing on, not giving up, seeing it through to the end. But how can we do that? Please understand, believers and unbelievers continue on because they have hope in someone or something. That is what keeps them going.

Martin Luther said, “Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”

Long before him Sophocles, the pagan, had written, “It is hope which maintains most of mankind.”

The poet, Alexander Pope, wrote, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.”

A modern man, O. S. Marden, says, “There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectation of something better tomorrow.”

And Carlyle, the Scottish philosopher, commented, “Man is, properly speaking, based upon hope, he has no other possession but hope, this world of his is emphatically the place of hope.”

Now when you look at this present world and the things that are happening, when you look at what man is doing, it is hard to have hope and, tragically many have lost hope! And let me say this, unless the object of your faith, your hope is able to help you, then your hope is in vain, it is futile, it is worthless. And many have found that out. There is not much hope for the future.

Well, let me clarify that. As Christians, our hope is tied to the Lord Jesus Christ and His return. That is what Paul said in Galatians 1:3-5, **“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

Because our hope is in the Lord and His return for us, we can endure on until the end because we know the end of the story, we know that we will be with Him for eternity! Let me share this with you and you will see what I mean about hope and how hope encourages us to continue on. We are told,

George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written in the aftermath of WW2, a time when Hitler had been defeated and the Soviet Union was on the rise. Orwell imagines what the world would be like under the control of authoritarian regimes.

In this world “Big Brother” controls everything – where people live, what they do, where they work, what they say, even how they think. “thought crime”, to think thoughts that are against the ideology of the Party, is a heinous wrong.

The central character in Orwell’s book is a man named Winston. He works at the Ministry of Truth, rewriting history so that it fits with Big Brother’s view of the world. But he despises what he does and the regime that makes him do it. Winston begins rebelling against the “Big Brother”, small but deliberate acts of defiance. He finds an alcove in his house where the cameras of Big Brother cannot observe him, he begins an illicit affair with a woman named Julia, and in his own thoughts he questions the way the world is. As each small act of rebellion occurs the likelihood Winston will be caught increases.

The tension rises until the fateful moment when Winston's resistance is exposed. He is sent to prison to be "rehabilitated". This means breaking him emotionally and physically and then turning him once more into a party drone. His interrogator is a man named O'Brien. He wants to convince Winston that resistance is futile, that the Party will never be defeated, that the present will stretch unending into the future. At one point O'Brien chillingly says to Winston: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever." It's a depressing image. The future no more than a repeat of the past.

To this the gospel screams a loud "NO!" It declares that death, disease and distress will not be the last word, that the risen Christ will return to restore the universe to goodness and justice. This is the Christian hope.

- Source Unknown

It is as Paul said in Titus 2:11-13, **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."**

What a wonderful hope we have and in that hope it causes us to live out our faith. To do those things that God desires us to do, not for salvation but for identification with Him! Why are so many Christians hopeless today? Maybe they are missing out on the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

I also see the problem of many Christians so caught up with the things of this world that they again are not looking for the Lord, they don't want Him to come any time soon! They just have too much going on in their life and they don't want the Lord to interrupt it.

I don't want to offend you, but if you truly feel that way, you are being very selfish.

“How can you say that Pastor Joe?” It is simple. Let me give you some statistics.

According to the World Health Organization, WHO, every year in the world there are an estimated 40-50 million abortions. This corresponds to approximately 125,000 abortions per day. In the USA, where nearly half of pregnancies are unintended and four in 10 of these are terminated by abortion, there are over 3,000 abortions per day.

Some 437,000 people were murdered worldwide in 2012, according to new UNODC study. Vienna, 10 April 2014 - Almost half a million people (437,000) across the world lost their lives in 2012 as a result of intentional homicide, according to a new study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

An estimated 208 million people internationally consume illegal drugs. In the United States, results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that 19.9 million Americans (or 8% of the population aged 12 or older) used illegal drugs in the month prior to the survey. And 200,000 die worldwide each year as a result of drug abuse.

According to “The Global Coalition To End Human Trafficking Now” 10 Million child prostitutes worldwide. (The Global Coalition To End Human Trafficking Now)

1 in 6 endangered runaways reported to NCMEC in 2014 where likely sex trafficking victims. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (2015) *Child Sex Trafficking*. [Accessed 29th December 2015]

“Traffickers show pornography to sex trafficking victims to train them and desensitize them to the sex acts they will be forced to perform.” National Center on Sexual Exploitation. (2015) *Pornography*

+ *Sex Trafficking: The Facts*. [Accessed 29th December 2015]

“Porn users demand a constant stream of new, increasingly violent and fetishized content. In order to keep up with this demand, more women and children become prostituted and trafficked.” National Center on Sexual Exploitation. (2015) *Pornography + Sex Trafficking: The Facts*. [Accessed 29th December 2015]

The only solution, the only hope for this world is not the continuation of the way things are going but the return of Jesus Christ to rule and reign from the throne of David! And I can't wait for His return. It is my hope and it is what keeps me going no matter what may come my way.

I like the way that John put it in I John 3:1-3, **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”**

Notice that John doesn't say that one day we will be children of God, we are already children of God, being adopted into the family of God by the new birth, by receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior!

But we also know that God is still molding and shaping our lives down here so that one day we will fit in up there – it is a lifelong process that will be completed when we go to be with Jesus.

Paul made that point in Philippians 3:20-21 when he said, **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”**

We are a work in progress. I think Stott rightly wrote, “What we are does not now appear to the world; what we shall be does not yet appear to us.”

Paul, in I Corinthians 13:12 makes this interesting point. He says, “**For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.**”

In the ancient world mirrors were made out of polished metal and thus, the image was not clear, it was distorted. John is telling us that we can’t see Jesus clearly now, but one day, face-to-face, we shall see Him perfectly clear!

Here is the point. To the extent you see Jesus now, you will be like Him but one day, as you see Him, His sinless nature will flow from your life as you go to be with Him. These bodies of flesh will be changed!

And here is the bottom line. People today have lost the hope of Christ’s return but folks, we need to keep that before us at all times because it helps us to walk in a worthy manner, in purity knowing He can return at any moment, any day! Thus, live every day as if He is coming back because our only hope is in Him and not this world!

So these Thessalonian believers not only had this ***WORK OF FAITH*** and ***LABOR OF LOVE*** but they also had this ***PATIENCE OF HOPE!***

And look at how this plays out as we move on to election in a minute. Their faith, love and hope are evidences of their election. Let’s read on and you will see what I mean.

VERSE 4

Like I have said, this whole idea of election and free-will have been debated and continues to be debated today. I don't think there needs to be a debate regarding this issue because I believe that it is 100% election! "So Pastor Joe, you are a Calvinist?" No, I also believe it is 100% free-will! "Oh, so then you are an Arminist?" No, I am neither. I believe what the Bible teaches regarding these things.

Let me show you what I mean. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8, "**For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God.**"

Now the million-dollar question is, "Does God give us the faith to believe?" One of the verses that are used to support that even the faith is a gift of God and we have no role in this is what we read here in Ephesians 2:8.

This is How J. I Packer translates this verse. "***For by grace you have been saved, through faith – this is not from yourselves, it [either faith as such or salvation and faith together] is the gift of God.***"

In other words, man has no free will in this matter; it is all predetermined by God. Faith is not a means of salvation to those in the Reformed Theology group, which J. I. Packer is part of; faith is a gift of God. No person, unregenerate person can **BELIEVE** unless and until the person is regenerated and only God can do that!

Are they right in saying that faith and salvation is a gift of God and we have no part in it? Is that what Paul is saying? New Testament Greek Scholar Harold W. Hoehner explains it like this,

Much debate has centered around the demonstrative pronoun “this” (touto). Though some think it refers back to “grace” and others to “faith,” neither of these suggestions is really valid because the demonstrative pronoun is neuter whereas “grace” and “faith” are feminine. Also, to refer back to either of these words specifically seems to be redundant. Rather the neuter touto, as is common, refers to the preceding phrase or clause. (In Eph 1:15 and 3:1 touto, “this,” refers back to the preceding section.) Thus it refers back to the concept of salvation (2:4–8a), whose basis is grace and means is faith. This salvation does not have its source in man (it is “not from yourselves”), but rather, its source is God’s grace for “it is the gift of God.”

- Harold W. Hoehner, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 624

Faith is our part, we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and it is God who then saves us. Thus, the basis is grace, the means is faith and it is a work of God! Let me give you a few verses to show you that faith is something we do; it is our part.

Listen to what we are told in John 1:12-13, “**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**”

In other words, the way we receive this spiritual birth, which then gives us the right to become the children of God is that we need to **RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST** and that involves **BELIEVING IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST!** We have a role, we have a choice, we must receive and believe and that is by faith!

Notice what we are told in I John 5:1, “**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God . . .**” Did you see that, “**Whoever believes . . .**” There is a choice to be made here and it is not God making that choice! It is not that God saved some and others He created for the fires of Hell, not at all! “**Whoever believes . . .**”!

And remember what John 3:16 says, “**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**” Again, we see that phrase, “**whoever believes.**”

In John 20:31 we are told, “**but these are written [the miracles recorded in the Gospel of John] that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**”

In Acts 17:30 we are told, “**Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.**” Who is called to repent? Man is and thus, he has a choice in what to do.

And lastly, I John 5:13 says, “**These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.**”

Yes, I believe that we are all sinners and unable by human performance to save ourselves. Works can never save us. We don't deserve salvation, it is a free gift, it is the grace of God. Our part is that we must believe and that is not work, that is faith!

Remember what Jesus said in John 6:29, “**. . . ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’**” Thus, the basis is grace, the means is faith and it is a work of God!

And if you really think about, if faith is a gift that God gives to us to be saved, what in the world is the Holy Spirit doing drawing people to Jesus? According to some, He is only drawing the elect, the select few and the others, they are going to Hell without a choice and in the end, it is God's fault that they went to Hell because He did not give them the faith to believe!

But again, Joshua said in Joshua 24:14-15, **“Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

Did you see the choice that was before them? They could serve the Lord or the pagan god's but it was their choice. For Joshua, by faith he was going to serve the Lord and may we follow in his footsteps!

In I Timothy 2:3-4 Paul tells us, **“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** If God desires all men to be saved, why do we see so many dying apart from being saved? The Calvinist would say that it is God's will but the Bible tells us, very simply, that it is the choice of man, his free will!

God does not send anyone to Hell, man goes there by choice. And if God created some for heaven and some for Hell, He is not a very good God. In fact, He is a horrible God. He is sending people to Hell and they have no choice. That is not what we read in the Scriptures.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** For the Calvinist, only those whom God has chosen can come, the others can't, even though Jesus said this to **“all”** they don't believe that is what He means, just the chosen!

And let's think this through. How can man be held accountable for not trusting in Jesus when God has already determined that they would not trust Jesus? That again makes God unjust, unfair, unrighteous in His actions. It truly makes man looking better than God and we know that is not true! As you look at the Scriptures it speaks of God choosing man and it also speaks of man accepting that invitation to salvation. God's Sovereignty and man's free will.

So how can I reconcile this free will and election with my mind? God never asks you to reconcile it but He does ask you to believe it by faith! But let me give you this picture to help you try to understand it a little more.

Think of railroad tracks running side by side. Both tracks are needed to move the train forward and to get it to the destination that it is going. Now picture one of the tracks being the Sovereignty of God, the election of God and the other track being man's free will. The tracks run parallel to each other, they never intersect each other but as we place our lives on these tracks, as we are saved, these tracks will lead us to our destination, Jesus and heaven! To me that is the simplest way to explain it.

And make no mistake about it, the Scriptures clearly teach that God chooses us, Divine Election! In Ephesians 1:4-6 Paul tells us, **“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”**

Jesus said in John 15:16, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”** So then we don't have a choice, we don't have free will? Not exactly.

Here again we see man's free will. Jesus said in John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**

And in Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”**

So what is the answer, Divine Election or Free Will? Yes! Again, I may not fully understand it, be able to comprehend it with my finite mind, but it is what the Bible teaches and thus, we must believe it by faith that we are chosen by God and we have a free will to receive Him into our lives.

Dr. Harry A. Ironside summed it up like this, “Scripture plainly teaches election based upon God’s foreknowledge. It is just as plain in its declarations of man’s free will. All men are invited to accept the salvation that God has provided in Jesus Christ. ‘Whosoever will’ means just what it says.” (What’s the Answer? p. 54).

Then how do you know if you are elected or not? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you are and if you reject Him, then you are not! The believers in Thessalonica were elected by God and they, by faith received that free gift of eternal life into their lives and now Paul is going to show us how this was manifested in their lives, that their faith was real as we will see over the next several weeks!

As I begin to close this morning, let me show you what I mean and we will then be looking at these verses over the next several weeks as I have said.

I am going to put I Thessalonians 1:3 next to I Thessalonians 1:9-10 and you will see how Paul knew that these Thessalonians were elected by God, they were saved – he saw their changed lives.

Your work of faith (v. 3)

You turned to God from idols (v.9)

Your labor of love (v. 3)

To serve the living and true God (v. 9)

And patience of hope (v. 3)

To wait for His Son from Heaven (v. 10)

Make no mistake about it, the person who claims to be one of God’s elect and yet their life has not changed, is only fooling himself! I am not saying you are going to be perfect when you get saved, but their needs to be that evidence for salvation. Think about it, whom God chooses He changes and if you receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be changed. God will receive you as you are but loves you too much to leave you as you are!