

HOLY WAITING

Living in Holiness as We Await the Return of Christ

A Holy, Chosen People

Key Idea:

Knowing who we are as God's holy, chosen people shapes how we live — joyfully receiving His Word, turning from false gods, faithfully proclaiming His Gospel, and eagerly waiting for His Son from heaven.

Key Text:

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ 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, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ 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 1:4–10 ESV**

Key Points:

- **God's Holy People Are Loved and Chosen** — Paul opens by grounding everything in divine love and election: the Thessalonians are “brothers loved by God” whom He has “chosen.” This echoes Israel's election in Deuteronomy 7:7–8, where God chose the least impressive people not because of their merit but because of His love. The word “holy” at its root means set apart and distinct. We are holy not because we first loved God, but because He first loved us — not because we chose Christ, but because God chose us.
- **God's Holy People Believe Through the Spirit's Power** — Paul knows the Thessalonians are chosen because of what happened when the Gospel was proclaimed: the Spirit worked in power and with full conviction. The Word was not mere human rhetoric — as Paul told the Corinthians, his message rested not in wisdom or eloquence but in the demonstration of the Spirit's power (1 Cor 2:4–5). Election is not seen directly but rather in its Spirit-wrought fruit.
- **God's Holy People Joyfully Receive the Gospel Even Under Affliction** — The Thessalonians received the Word with joy despite facing immediate persecution (Acts 17). In doing so they became imitators of Jesus and the apostles, who also held to God's Word in the face of hostility. Joyful reception of the Gospel inevitably puts believers out of step with the world — but the Spirit's presence makes joy possible even under pressure.

- **God’s Holy People Turn from Idols to the True and Living God** — The essence of holiness is turning from the false gods of the age and embracing the living and true God by faith. This language echoes Jeremiah 10:10. The Thessalonians — many of them formerly Gentile idolaters — became God’s holy people through faith. Changed conduct flows from this turned identity; it is the fruit, not the root.
- **God’s Holy People Sound Forth the Word in Mission** — Despite being a young, persecuted, numerically small congregation, the Thessalonians became a model for believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia. The Word rang out from them locally and far away, and the news of their faith preceded Paul. God’s holy people are blessed to be a blessing — set apart for mission.
- **God’s Holy People Are Sustained by Holy Waiting** — The Thessalonians turned to God to “wait for his Son from heaven.” Their identity was forward-facing: they were a people of hope, sustained by the certain return of Jesus who was raised from the dead and who will deliver His people from the wrath to come. The fruit of this hope is steadfast endurance now (1 Thess 1:3). No one should be more hopeful than God’s people — for we know who rules, how the story ends, and the glory that awaits.

Discussion Questions:

- The series is called “Holy Waiting.” Last week’s teaching introduced the Thessalonians as a persecuted church in a hostile city. As we continue into chapter 1, what strikes you about the way Paul describes these believers — people who were young in the faith, under pressure, and yet are held up as a model for the whole region?
- Paul says he knows the Thessalonians are “loved by God” and “chosen” because of what happened when the Gospel came to them — the Spirit worked in power and with full conviction. How does this reshape the way we should think about evangelism and Gospel proclamation? What does it mean in practice to trust the Spirit’s power rather than our own persuasiveness?
- Bret traced the word “holy” back to its root meaning: set apart and distinct. We are holy not because we chose God, but because He chose and set us apart. How does grounding our holiness in God’s prior love and election — rather than in our own decisions or moral performance — change the way holiness feels? Does it feel like burden or freedom?
- The Thessalonians received the Gospel “with the joy of the Holy Spirit” even in the midst of much affliction. Bret noted that joyful reception of God’s Word will inevitably put us out of step with the culture and bring pressure or persecution. Where do you feel that friction most in your own life right now? What does it look like to receive God’s Word with joy even there?
- Verse 9 describes the Thessalonians turning “to God from idols.” In “Applying the Word” Bret stated that our culture offers us identity-shaping idols — ethnicity, politics, sexual identity, nationality. What idols most actively compete for your loyalty and identity? What does it look like concretely to “turn” from them to the true and living God?
- The Thessalonians became a model and sent the Word forward, even as a young, small, persecuted church. They didn’t wait until they were established or suffering-free to engage in

mission. What does their example say to the excuses we make for not sounding forth the Word? What would it look like for our congregation to be described the way Paul describes Thessalonica?

- The final movement of 1 Thessalonians 1 is holy waiting: they turned from idols “to wait for his Son from heaven.” This waiting is not passive — it produces work, labor, and steadfast endurance (v3). How does the hope of Christ’s return actually fuel your engagement with the present rather than disconnecting you from it? In what areas of your life does that hope need to be more consciously operative?
- Bret said: “No one should be more hopeful than God’s people — for we know who rules, how the story will end, and the glorious life that awaits us.” How does your actual, daily emotional posture compare to that statement? What does it tell us about our hearts when God’s people are more anxious or despairing than the world around them?
- The Table of Holy Waiting: The Lord’s Supper both announces Christ’s death and proclaims His return (“you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes,” 1 Cor 11:26). Titus 2:11–14 describes the grace of God training us to live “godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope.” How does regularly coming to this Table shape you as a people of holy waiting? In what ways does it reorient your identity, your turning from idols, and your hope?

For Further Study:

- Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10 slowly this week, tracing each mark of God’s holy, chosen people that Paul identifies. Notice how each characteristic flows from the prior love and election of God rather than from human merit or striving.
- Study Deuteronomy 7:6–8 alongside 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 to see how the election of the Thessalonians fulfills and extends Israel’s election. Ask: what does it mean that Gentile believers in Thessalonica are now the heirs of this covenant identity?
- Meditate on Titus 2:11–14 — the Communion text from Sunday. How does the grace of God that “trains us” to live godly lives flow directly from the hope of Christ’s return? Let it reframe holiness as the fruit of hope rather than the ground of it.
- This week, identify one area where a cultural idol is competing most actively with your identity as God’s holy, chosen people. Write it down. Pray specifically that the Spirit would strengthen you to turn from it and to embrace the living and true God in that area.
- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by [series](#), [Scripture](#), or [topic](#) for a deeper study of [holiness](#), [election and calling](#), [idolatry and false gods](#), [evangelism and missions](#), [eschatology](#), [second coming](#), [endurance](#), and [hope](#).