

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-5

The church in Thessalonica is an example of what a biblical church is supposed to be. We might even say they are the exact opposite of the church in Corinth. That church was a spiritual mess. The basic ingredients of a healthy church are found in Thessalonica. There is a sense that this church was unified, and Paul was unified with them. Paul commends them for several things which we will see in our study today, and throughout the rest of the letter.

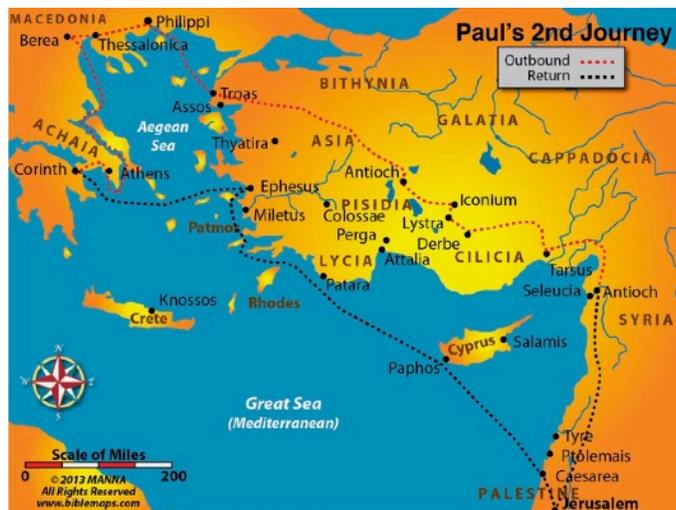
Verse 1 -

Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and **Timotheus** (Timothy) were most likely all together in Corinth (Acts 18:5) when this letter was written to the church in Thessalonica. Timothy had returned from Thessalonica to Corinth and delivered a good report about what was happening among the Corinthians (See 1 Thessalonians 3:6).

Paul. In nine of Paul's thirteen letters, he refers to himself as an "apostle." In the four letters where he does not (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon), it may be in the two cities he was held with a greater affection. In Philemon, he is writing a letter to a friend, his beloved Apphia. In this case, writing to two churches that loved him and to his friend, he had no need to assert his authority.

The Epistles of Paul | Date of Writing*

| Letter | Date of Writing | Place of Writing |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1st Thessalonians | 54 A.D. | Corinth |
| 2nd Thessalonians | 54 A.D. | Corinth? |
| 1st Corinthians | 59 A.D. | Ephesus |
| 2nd Corinthians | 60 A.D. | Philippi |
| Galatians | 58 A.D. | Corinth |
| Romans | 60 A.D. | Corinth |
| Philemon | 64 A.D. | Rome - In prison |
| Colossians | 64 A.D. | Rome - In prison |
| Ephesians | 64 A.D. | Rome - In prison |
| Philippians | 64 A.D. | Rome - In prison |
| 1st Timothy | 65 A.D. | ? |
| Titus | 65 A.D. | ? |
| 2nd Timothy | 66 A.D. | Rome - In prison (2x)? |



Unto the church. The Greek word for church is **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklesia*) which is a generic term for an *assembly of people*. It is a gathering of *called-out ones*. In this case, the *assembly* is identified as, **in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ**. When Paul uses the word **church** throughout his writings, his meaning is primarily the body of Christ. This would be the true definition and identifying mark of a Christian church today.

When we read the word **church** in the New Testament, we should not always think of it as the church as we know it. For example, when reading Matthew 16:18; 18:17, our tendency is to apply those passages to us in the 21st century. When Jesus spoke those words, however, the church as we know it was still a mystery and did not even exist. Paul says the mystery of the church which is Christ's body, where the distinction between Jew and Gentile disappears, was not made known until it was revealed by God to Paul (Ephesians 3:3,6,9,10).

What did Jesus mean in Matthew 16:18? Could Jesus have been speaking of the remnant assembly of Israel and the future Kingdom where His assembly will be built in Zion (Joel 2:16; Romans 9:25-27)?

Grace be unto you. Grace is the Greek word **χάρις** (*charis*), and it is translated throughout the New Testament as *grace, favor, thank, pleasure, benefit*, and a few other synonyms. In this case, it could mean favor, as in *may God's favor be upon you*.

Peace. When Paul was suddenly sent away from Thessalonica because of Jewish opposition (Acts 17:10), the city was in a state of uproar (Acts 17:5). Paul was wishing an end to the chaos, and peace upon them, which can only come from **God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Verse 2 -

We give thanks...for you...in our prayers. It is good to give thanks to God for those we serve with. The word **thanks** is **εὐχαριστέω** *eucharisteo*. We get our word eucharist, which we call the Lord's supper or communion. It is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24,

24 And when he had given thanks, he broke *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

We partake of communion, not because we are commanded but in thanks (*eucharisteo*) for what the Lord has done. Our desire should be to remember his sacrifice on the cross for our sins. The *thanks* we give is more than just a typical "thank you." It is an attitude of gratefulness and a real feeling of thankfulness. In that way, Paul gave thanks for the Christians in Thessalonica.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were **giving thanks always**. There is a trite saying that circulates in Christian circles, "I'll pray for you." Yet, easier said than done. Perhaps a better response would be to pray for the person first and then tell them, "I just prayed for you." If we say we are going to pray for someone, we should do it or not say anything at all. Paul and his fellow laborers prayed for the Thessalonica church **always**. We may forget to pray for those who are faithful to the Lord. Paul, Silas, and Timothy really prayed for this church in Thessalonica.

Verse 3 -

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith. The first thing they remembered to pray for was the Thessalonians' work of faith. We have difficulty reading *work and faith* together. We know we are saved by grace through faith and not of works (Ephesians 2:8,9), so this cannot mean they *worked for their faith*. The solution is in the preposition "*of*" and its *genitive*. The genitive case is a grammatical case for nouns and pronouns. It is most commonly used for showing possession.

There are several usages of classes of the Genitive case. According to E.W. Bullinger (How to Enjoy the Bible):

1. **The Genitive of Origin.** This marks the source from which anything has its origin, such as Ezekiel 1:1, "Visions **of** God" = Visions proceeding from God. Or, Romans 4:11,13, "Righteousness **of** faith" = Righteousness coming through faith. Or, 2 Corinthians 11:26, "Perils **of** water" = Perils occasioned by water.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, their work of faith could be, their work that proceeds from faith. Or, as Bullinger states it could be,

2. **The Genitive of Character**. This genitive case would read as "work of faith" = faithful work.

Paul commends them for their **work of faith**, and their **labor of love**. Perhaps he is referring to the way they saved him from inevitable persecution (Acts 17:10). And he commends them for their **patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father**. When the non-believing Jews recruited wicked men (Acts 17:5) to disrupt the city of Thessalonica and spread fake news, it caused trouble or doubt among the people (Acts 17:8). Nonetheless, they maintained their patience of hope in the Lord.

Verse 4 -

Election. This is a controversial word. From a Calvinistic viewpoint, it means that God, before the foundation of the world, created a ballot and elected who would be saved, and who would not be saved. It was predetermined, and man has no choice in the matter.

This cannot be what this means because if so, why did Paul even bother to go to Thessalonica and *reason with the Jews out of the scriptures* (Acts 17:2; cf. Acts 18:4). It seems rather ridiculous for Paul to have gone through the motions of reasoning and persuading when it had already been decided by God beforehand who would be saved.

Whatever this word **election** means here, it is not for salvation. It may mean, after salvation, God had chosen them to spread the good news. Paul does not tell us what he means, so we should not read into the word what we think he means.

Verse 5 -

We hear and say the word **gospel**, but what does it mean? The Greek word **εὐαγγέλιον** *evangelion*, means *good news*.

The gospel or Good news is presented in several different ways throughout Scripture. Here are a few ways it is used.

- 1. There is an everlasting gospel** or good news that has been presented to mankind since after the fall of Adam. The message of this gospel is that the Creator alone is to be feared and there are to be no other gods beside Him. He will be the final judge of men. Enoch was the first to prophesy this (Jude 14,15). Before the Kingdom is set up, it will be preached once more (Revelation 14:6,7).
- 2. There is the gospel of the Kingdom.** First promised to Abraham and his seed to be made into a great nation in which all the nations would be blessed, then that promise was gradually expanded (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:4, 8-21). There will be a kingdom where the King will sit on the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7). This gospel of the kingdom concerned a Person who would "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This Savior whom God anointed and appointed, and sent had been foretold (Isaiah 53), but was rejected. The Lord Himself spoke of this gospel of the coming kingdom in parables.
- 3. There is the gospel of the grace of God.** The substance of this good news of grace is found in Romans 1:1-6. It was not new and had been promised before and written down by the prophets. It concerns Jesus Christ, which from His earthly line was from the seed of David. It was proclaimed in the New Testament by the apostle Paul, Peter, and other apostles. It is a gospel of pure grace and favor of God on all mankind.
- 4. There is the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4).** This relates to Jesus Christ's exaltation as Head over all things to His church, which is, His body--Paul develops this gospel and reveals it more fully in the Prison Letters (Ephesians 1:21-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:14-19). It involves the present glory of Messiah and includes the final defeat of Satan, the crushing of his head and bringing all things unto Christ's submission.

And it is Satan's great aim now in our day, to blind the eyes of them that do not believe, so that they may not learn of his coming defeat, as was foretold in Genesis 3:15, and seen fulfilled in Revelation 20:10. Since we know Satan's plan we can make known the good news that he seeks to hide. We can proclaim the Gospel of the glory of Christ!

It is of this gospel; everlasting, kingdom, grace, and glory of Christ that Paul is referring to in verse 5.

This is the gospel that is not just in **word**, but it came in **power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance**. This is the powerful, Holy Spirit driven word of God, and we can be sure it

is true, we can be *assured* of our salvation by it because of the messengers who brought it. Paul, Silas, and Timothy proved themselves to the Thessalonians as being real.

The church needs real men and women who are in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need people like that, messengers of the Gospel, for the sake of those who need Jesus Christ!