

## 1 Thessalonians 1

### Introduction

Formerly the capital city of Macedonia, this port city is now called Salonichi in Turkey. The city lies on the Via Egnatia – the major road to Rome. Acts chapter 17 tells the story of Paul bringing Christianity to the city. The Jews of the city persecuted the new Christian church because some of their folks converted, and Paul and team were forced to flee. Timothy was sent back to help to get the church established. This is the first letter that the Apostle Paul wrote, the earliest of his writings in the New Testament. His chief concern was to correct a misunderstanding that had arisen about the Day of the Lord.

This was typical of letters of that day. Many parchments have been discovered from that age that were letters with the same format. There is a greeting, prayer, thanksgiving, body of the letter, and salutations. In that sense, Paul was following the format of letters of that day. He was writing a personal letter to this new church with whom he had only spent about 3 weeks. I don't think he had any idea that we would be reading it for edification and instruction 2000 years later. It is not as if he sat down and composed it over days, but quickly spoke to a scribe what was on his heart. Sometimes the sentences were not complete, and yet, the message comes through.

This is the first letter Paul wrote. Some believe it was the first New Testament portion to be written, though I don't agree with that conclusion. It was written around 52-53 A.D. In Acts 16 we read about the divine direction given to Paul by the leading of the Spirit and a vision. Acts 16:6-10. This is how he was led to Thessalonica, a key city in the spread of the Gospel throughout Asia Minor.

*1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.*

Though the letter is recognized to be dictated by Paul, he includes his assistants. Paul did not see himself as above others, but did recognize his call as an apostle. He had a special role in the early church, but did not put himself above others. In the last city, Phillipi, Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrown in prison. An earthquake had set them free, and that caused the conversion of the jailer and his family. After fleeing Thessalonica, Paul was anxious for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. They worked as a team.

Paul referred to the church of a city. Everyone in a city that believes is a part of the church of that city. It doesn't matter where they worship. The church are those who are in God the Father and God the Son. Everyone in Christ in your city is a part of the church of that city. We tend to think just of those we gather with, or worse yet, our building. The church are those who are called out of the world to be in Christ, to be an example of the life of Christ in that city.

Grace and peace were common greetings. You can find them in many of Paul's letters and secular letters of the day. For Christians, this common greeting took on new significance. Because of the grace of God expressed to us in Christ's sacrifice for us, we now have peace with God.

*2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul continually prayed for the churches he planted, thanking God for them. He told the Ephesians the same thing. (Ephesians 1:15-16) Do you thank God for the good Christian brothers and sisters that God has brought into your life?

He goes on to tell the specific things that he is thankful for. The first was their works produced by faith. Whatever they did, they did it for the Lord and for His glory. Colossians 3:23-24 Are your works out of faith, or are they just the drudgery of making a living?

Secondly, he was thankful for their labor prompted by love. This makes my heart thankful too. Lately I have seen a number of believers do things out of love, helping others just because they love the Lord and the family of God. Some of it is a real sacrifice, but they want to express their gratitude to God. It is a real labor of love.

Third is their endurance inspired by hope. They believed that the Lord was going to return and reward everyone according to what they have done. In the face of persecution, they did not give up, but kept on enduring. Since Paul only had a short time with them, he must have been especially impressed and grateful for this quality in them.

*4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5a because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.*

The Jews used the phrase "loved by God" in reference to Moses, Solomon, or the nation of Israel. In Christ, the humblest gentile had this honorary phrase applied to them. It is applied to you too!

There is something fascinating here. I can speak to some folks and never sense divine inspiration or leading. The same day, even an hour later with a different group and the Lord is so present among us that everyone is in awe. What is the difference? The second group is hungry for the word, ready to receive and be changed. The words of the speaker are empowered with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. It takes both the dedication of the speaker and willing hearts of those who listen to have that powerful affect. When I sense that happening, like

Paul, I am encouraged that God has chosen those people because something supernatural occurs.

*5b You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*

Paul may have been addressing some of the opposition that accused him of trying to get followers for his own advantage. He reminded them of his dedication and hard work. They were impressed with more than his words. His life impressed them to the point of being willing to suffer to be like him. As they received his message, they sensed the joy of the Holy Spirit. In turn, they became examples to everyone in Asia. May God raise up such examples among us!

*8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,* Their example was in the daily news all over the known world. The phrase "rang out" was used to describe a clap of thunder. Their lives made some noise! In those days, travelers would tell of things they had seen in other cities. The example set by the Thessalonians had become a topic of conversation all over. The day in which they lived it would have been prudent to lay low, but they refused to be silent. They freely let people know they belonged to Christ and served Him. Wouldn't that be wonderful if it was the case with us as well? What would have to change? What would that look like?

Most of the believers in Thessalonica were converted pagans. They once worshipped idols. What is our modern comparison to an idol? Look up and consider is Ephesians 5:5.

*10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

This was the rest of their testimony that was heard everywhere. They were waiting for Jesus return. They declared the resurrection of Christ – very appropriate for this Easter Season. He rescued them from the wrath of God by taking their just sentence upon Himself. Later we will find that they went a bit overboard in their expectation of Jesus' return. We should plan and serve as if we have a whole life ahead of us, but be prepared for His return at any moment. Extremes can easily take us off track in one direction or another. Service and patient waiting are the qualities of a balanced Christian life.