

I Thessalonians 1

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example

² We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³ remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For **we know**, brothers and sisters, beloved by God, that he has **chosen** you, ⁵ because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as **you know** what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became **imitators of us** and of the **Lord**, for in spite of persecution you received the **word** with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the **Lord** has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹ For the people of those regions report about us **what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.**

- The word “church” (v1) simply means an “assembly,” and perhaps it evokes a *holy* community – one called into being by God (v4).
- “Grace and peace” are mentioned as a standard adaptation of the Hebrew greetings of “mercy and peace (v1).
- Paul begins with a thanksgiving report, though brief, it gains the audiences’ goodwill (v2).
- There is a rhythmic flair which has its own rhetorical force in the style of writing.
- The expressions “beloved by God” and “chosen” are terms of election drawn from the Old Testament. This again implies that Paul understands the church to be the new Israel of God (v4).
- The first five verses announced some basic themes. For a start, it announces the effectiveness of the initial word (Gospel) and its subsequent practices.
- There is a stress of what Paul *knows* and of what the church *knows* (v4-5).
- The church knows the effectiveness of Paul and his coworkers, whose subsequent actions and practices were affected for the sake of the church.
- For a young church to be reminded by those assurances is helpful given that they are experiencing local hostility.
- Paul is announcing his theme of *persistence*.
- Paul prays *continually*. There is the expression of “steadfastness in hope” (v3).
- That stress on persistence or endurance is a strong message from Paul in light of their circumstances which could have easily tempted them to fall away.

- *What is it that we are thankful for today in the lives of our churches? Signs of faith? Numerical growth? Financial Security? Uhm. . . .!!*
- The expression “word” (v6) does *not* mean the Old Testament or the LXX but a Spirit-inspired word about God's actions in Jesus Christ that the founders preached at Thessalonica. The Spirit's inspiration is important because that is why the church was formed, i.e., without God's input nothing effective would have happened.
- Paul sees himself as a *model* and encourages them to *imitate* him (v6). This need not be seen as pretentious, but typical of Jewish rabbis and Greek philosophers addressing their followers.
- The persecution evidently did not have the effect of weakening their resolve. Their reputation has now spread which is a source of good news to Paul personally and a sign of God's effectiveness amongst them.
- The mention of persecution and wrath all signs of *apocalyptic* language. It likely refers to the Jewish apocalyptic belief that certain woes would precede the consummation of the new age - see Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:9-14; Mark 13:19, 24.
- The church is also praised for its zeal given this hostility. The power of the gospel is not just a one-time instigation of the church community, but one that causes the church to endure.
- The language of “turning” (v9) was common amongst philosophical circles.
- Turning from idols (statues) to the *living* (and true) God is stressed.
- Clearly the return of Jesus is anticipated (a topic that is addressed later, 1 Thess 4:13-5:11).