

1 Thessalonians 1: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 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 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 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, 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, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

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. 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, 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, commonly regarded as likely Paul's first letter, begins with a typical Pauline greeting. The greeting is a more standard greeting for letters of the period.

[1 : 30] It declares or introduces the writer or the writers. It identifies the addressees, on this occasion the Thessalonians, the Christians in the church at Thessalonica. This is followed by greetings, and as most letters followed this with a wish for the health of the addressees, Paul's epistles typically have a thanksgiving or prayer at this point.

Paul includes Silas, Silvanus is an alternative form of the name Silas, and Timothy with him as those sending the letter. However, in verse 18 of chapter 2, where he writes, I, Paul, we have a suggestion that Paul is the one writing the letter in all of their names.

While it is sent under all their names then, Paul is the true author. Silas was one of Paul's missionary companions in his second missionary journey, during which they had visited Thessalonica.

Their visit there had been short and abortive, which helps us better to appreciate Paul's joy and wonder in the lasting fruit that it had produced. In Acts chapter 17 verses 1 to 10 we read of this period.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

[2 : 58] And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.

And the people in the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.

Timothy had joined Paul and Silas back in Lystra, at the beginning of Acts chapter 16. In verses 1 to 5 of that chapter we read, Paul came also to Derby and to Lystra.

A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

[4 : 20] As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decision that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Timothy came to function as if a son to Paul, who represented him as a son might represent his father, and who could act in his name. Timothy presumably was present with Paul and Silas in Thessalonica, and perhaps he stayed on there for a little while after Paul and Silas escaped.

Paul addresses his letter to the church of the Thessalonians. The church was a way of referring to the communal assembly of a body of people. It is not unlikely that they had various smaller groups within the city, but the whole body of believers in that city are termed a church.

They are described as being in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a very unusual reference to a church being in God, something that is associated in the closest way to the church being in Christ.

As Gordon Fee notes, this is probably an indication of the very high Christology, or the strong doctrine of the divinity of Christ, that Paul holds. It is not unlikely that the Shema can be heard behind such a formula.

[5 : 33] Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. The term God is related to the Father, the term Lord to Christ. Both Christ and the Father are related to the one God.

Where a typical letter of the time would begin with the salutation, greetings, Paul opens his letter as he often does, grace to you and peace. The source of the grace is God, and the consequence of this grace is the peace of Christ.

The thanksgiving that follows situates the gratitude that Paul expresses within the context of the continual prayers of Paul and his missionary companions. They recall the initial response of the Thessalonians to the gospel message that they brought.

This remembrance is before God. It is probably not merely a subjective bringing of these details to their minds, and thankfulness for the memory. It is also a declaration of these things in their prayers to the Lord, constantly calling for his attention to these things, calling for him to complete what he has started in the Thessalonians.

[6:52] Their labour of love could have been the efforts manifesting their hearts of devotion for Christ and the Father, and their steadfastness of hope might have been their unwavering assurance of and living in terms of the Lord's promise.

The Christian virtues with which they answered the message revealed that they had first been lovingly chosen by God, their eyes being opened to see Christ. That is why faith, hope and love were the fruit that sprang up.

It wasn't just words of Paul the Apostle, the gifted retrotician. It was an effective communication of the Spirit that broke open hard hearts and produced new life where death had once reigned, resulting in remarkable and manifest transformation.

Indeed, their reputation has spread abroad among the churches. Paul and his companions don't even need to say anything about the Thessalonians to churches elsewhere, because those other churches have already heard and are talking about the news from Thessalonica.

What is this word of the Lord that Paul refers to here? It is the news of what God had done among them. Which is also the message of their answering faith, an answering faith that is proof of the Lord's power in and among them.

[9 : 20] A question to consider. The news of what the Lord had done in the hearts and lives of the Thessalonians itself became a word of the Lord and a gospel message.

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