
a ***Grace Notes*** course

1 Thessalonians

an expositional study
by Dr. Grant Richison

Lesson 1

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

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Introduction

VALUE OF STUDYING 1 THESSALONIANS

A. We get a powerful picture of the ministry of the great apostle Paul.

B. We get a picture of the dynamics of an early church.

C. We receive the encouragement of our hope in Christ.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MINISTRY AT THESSALONICA

A. At Troy, Paul received the Macedonian vision to go to Europe, Acts 16:8-14.

This was the beginning of spreading the gospel from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe.

Going to Thessalonica brought the ministry of the gospel to Western civilization.

Macedonia was the former kingdom of Alexander the Great (he wanted to dominate the world and spread one world domination and enlightenment through the Greek culture. He wanted to marry East and West).

B. Paul came to minister in Thessalonica for three successive and successful weeks.

The Jews accused Paul's evangelistic team of "turning the world upside down." Paul fled the city in the face of much opposition.

C. The principal people in the church at Thessalonica were Gentiles (1 Thessalonians 1:9; Acts 17:4).

THE CITY OF THESSALONICA

A. In Paul's day, Thessalonica was a famous city in the zenith of its splendor.

B. Famous harbor:

Situated on the Thermic Gulf, a natural harbor. When he invaded Europe, Xerxes the Persian established his naval base in this bay. It was one of the world's greatest dockyards of Roman

C. Free city:

No troops quartered within it.

Autonomy in all internal affairs.

D. One hundred miles Southwest of Philippi and more important than Philippi.

While Philippi was a Roman colony, Thessalonica's culture was distinctly Greek.

E. Most populous city in Macedonia.

F. Large share in the commerce of the Aegean.

G. Strategic importance:

Harbor and the Egnatian Way were crucial to spreading Christianity to all the world.

The Egnatian Way went West to Rome and East to Asia.

H. In post-apostolic times the gospel made rapid progress in Thessalonica.

I. Thessalonica is the city of Salonica today (or Thessaloniki),

J. Population in the first century: about 200,000 people

FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH, ACTS 17:1-10

Paul founded the Thessalonian church on his second missionary expedition.

Paul got an immediate response to the gospel.

When Paul left Thessalonica, he went to Berea, then Athens and finally Corinth where he wrote First Thessalonians.

OCCASION

A. Immediate occasion: report of Timothy to Paul at Corinth about the state of the Thessalonica church. His report indicated that they were steadfast and making progress in their faith.

B. On the whole, affairs of the church were in good state, especially in view of the fact that most believers were new Christians (1 Thessalonians 1:7; 2:14; 3:4-6; 4:9,10).

C. The problems:

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Some people were seeking to undermine Paul, accusing him of false teaching, immoral teaching and hypocrisy.

Some indicated that he was afraid to return (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

They accused Paul of being greedy and using flattery (1 Thessalonians 2:5,6).

There were Cliques in the church (1 Thessalonians 5:13,20, 26-27).

There was confusion about the end times (1 Thessalonians 4:11-18; 5:1-6).

Some believers despised authority (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14).

Some had relapsed into immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

PURPOSES

- A. To fortify young believers in basic doctrine.
- B. To encourage them in holy living.
- C. To comfort them with the coming of Christ.
- D. To correct false doctrine.
- E. To urge respect for leadership.
- F. To remove suspicions which would undermine their faith.
- G. To encourage them through persecution.
- H. To express thanks to them.
- I. To instruct them in church life.
- J. To combat errors of conduct rather than errors of belief.

PLACE OF WRITING: CORINTH

DATE: WINTER AD 51-52

Gallio was proconsul of the province of Achaia, AD 52

About 20 years after the resurrection

DESIGNATION

Some Jews.

Great number of Gentiles.

Great number of chief women.

THEME – RAPTURE (EVERY CHAPTER)

- A. Anticipating Christ Himself (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10).
- B. Anticipating reward (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20).
- C. Anticipating advance (1 Thessalonians 3:12,13).
- D. Anticipating reunion with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- E. Anticipating perfection (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

KEY VERSES: 1 THESSALONIANS 1:9,10

"For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to 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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

PECULIARITIES OF THE EPISTLE

- A. One of the earliest epistles that Paul wrote.
- B. Contains no Old Testament quotes.
- C. Church composed largely of ex-Gentiles (1 Thessalonians 1:9).
- D. 5 chapters; 89 verses; 1,857 words in the King James Version.
- E. A friendly, personal letter.
- F. "Lord" applied to Jesus 25 times.
- G. Young Christians in the church.
- H. 1 Thessalonians is older than Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, and every other New Testament book except Galatians.
- I. The Thessalonian church is the only church not censured for anything.

OUTLINE

- A. Salutation (1 Thessalonians 1:1).

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- B. The model church (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10).
- C. A model ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12).
- D. Suffering (1 Thessalonians 3:1-13).
- E. Sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:24).
- F. Conclusion (1 Thessalonians 5:25-28).

1 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 from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

We now come to the second book Paul wrote, the book of 1 Thessalonians.

The first verse of 1 Thessalonians is the salutation or the greeting. Usually the salutation included three landmarks: names of the writer/s, the addressee(s) and a formal greeting.

Paul,

Paul is the author of First Thessalonians. He was known as Saul of Tarsus in his non-Christian days. He became the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Thirteen books start with the name "Paul." Paul says nothing specific about himself in this verse. In many of his epistles, he calls himself "the slave of Jesus Christ" or "an apostle of Jesus Christ." The Thessalonians did not doubt his credibility, so he did not feel the need to establish his trustworthiness here. They knew full well that he served Jesus the Lord. Paul does not begin his epistles with the customary introductions common in our day. Salutations of our day are irrelevant. We begin a business letter with the term "Gentlemen" even though there may not be a gentleman in the whole crowd! We write, "Dear Sir," when we know that they are neither "dear" nor "sir!" However, we cannot start a letter with "Hey, you" either!

The name "Paul" means "little." If there was anyone who could call himself "Mr. Big," it was

the apostle Paul. He was the greatest missionary of the first century.

In Judaism, he had a promising career. He was a Pharisee. He was an outstanding persecutor of the church. When he ran out of victims in Jerusalem, he went to Damascus to capture more Christians (Acts 9:1-2). He was on his way to murder disciples in Damascus.

On the road to Damascus, he met the risen Lord and received Jesus Christ as his Savior. As a Christian, he spread the gospel to the Gentile Roman world. The Lord Jesus ruined his previous career. One look at Jesus changed everything in his life. Jesus' worst enemy became his greatest emissary.

Paul was not one of the 12 original Apostles. One qualification for apostleship was seeing Jesus. He saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9). God gave him miraculous powers to authenticate his apostleship (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

The word "apostle" conveys the idea of special commission from God. The apostle was under a divine commission to found the church and write Scripture. This is the highest-ranking gift in the Bible. There are no more apostles today. No one today has the right to write Scripture. This gift, as all gifts, can only be bestowed by the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11,13).

Paul was the human author of Scripture but the Holy Spirit was the divine author (2 Peter 1:20). This does not mean that the human author mechanically writes Scripture with little or no input from His person. It means that the Holy Spirit guides every word he writes to convey accurately what God wants to communicate to humans.

Paul was Christ's apostle, not an apostle of the church. He was a special emissary on a special divine assignment from Christ (John 17:18). He took his marching orders from Jesus Christ.

Paul concluded his brilliant career in a dungeon. Jesus promoted him to heaven by

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virtue of a guillotine--the Roman government decapitated him. This is a thumbnail sketch of the former Saul of Tarsus. He gave his entire life to Christ. His philosophy was this – "for me to live is Christ."

Principle

When Jesus Christ fills our horizon, we can do nothing else but serve Him.

Application

When we truly meet the Lord Jesus, we lose interest in pleasing our self. The greatest thing that can happen to young people is to meet the Lord Jesus young enough so that they can give their entire lives to the Lord. Boyfriends, girlfriends, cars, careers do not compare with knowing and serving Him (Philippians 3:10). When we devote our life to the Son of God, we live without regret.

Paul makes his own commitment clear in 1 Corinthians 9:16,17, "If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" He said, "I must preach the gospel whether I want to do it or not. Whether it is convenient or not, I have no choice."

God is not a cruel taskmaster. He is a wonderful Master who gives us a sense of satisfaction when we serve Him. Paul did not quit. He served to the best of his ability, which is all God asks. This kind of commitment gives us direction, point and purpose. We keep our drive no matter what opposition may come our way.

A hundred years from now it will make very little difference where we stood before the great people of our day. However, a hundred years from now it will be of utmost importance where we stand in reference to Jesus Christ. That will determine where we will be in eternity; it will demarcate how we lived our life in time.

Silvanus,

Silvanus and Timothy united with Paul in sending this epistle to the Thessalonians. Silvanus is the Latin spelling of "Silas" (Acts 15:22) so Silvanus is the same as the Silas of the book of Acts. Silvanus served both great missionaries of the first century. He served Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. He also served the apostle to the Jews. Silvanus was an amanuensis (secretary, 1 Peter 5:12). Here is an anonymous Christian who did not take the credit to himself, but faithfully did his job as unto the Lord.

Silvanus was a prophet from the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22, 32). That church dispatched him along with Paul and Barnabas to take the decree from the Jerusalem conference to the church in Antioch.

At Antioch, Paul and Barnabas quarreled over Mark, because Mark defected from the first missionary mission (Acts 15:36-41). Mark was a relative of Barnabas. They divided over this. Paul refused to take Mark on his next mission, because of his earlier desertion. Paul chose Silvanus to accompany him on his missionary expedition to Asia Minor, and ultimately to Macedonia and Achaia. Barnabas chose Mark to go with him (Acts 15:41-18:5). We do not hear of Mark again in the book of Acts. An opportunity of a lifetime came to Silvanus because he was available for God to use him.

Setting out from Antioch, Paul made his way through Syria and Cilicia to the towns of Southern Galatia (Derbe and Lystra) where he took Timothy as a companion (Acts 16:1-3). From there he passed through Phrygia to Northern Galatia (Pessinus, Ancyra, and Tavium) and founded new churches.

Prevented from proceeding to Bithynia, Paul's team moved on from Galatia into Mysia and Troy. Here Luke joined (Acts 16:10-17) the team. Silvanus accompanied the team through Syria, Asia Minor, Philippi and Thessalonica. He helped form the church in Thessalonica. He fled Thessalonica with the team to Berea. When Paul left Berea for Athens, Silvanus stayed at

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Berea and then joined Paul later at Corinth (Acts 16-18).

Silvanus was an important figure in the churches in Macedonia. Acts 18:18 suggests that he may have remained in Macedonia when Paul left. His early connections with the church in Jerusalem were helpful in giving added theological legitimacy to Paul's missionary enterprises. Silvanus was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38). He was also a Jew. This was a help to Paul as well.

Paul mentions Silvanus in his introductions to some of his epistles (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:19). Except in 2 Corinthians 1:19, Paul mentions him in reference to the writing of these epistles. He was a secretary to Paul and both secretary and a courier for Peter. The New Testament does not name him again until a reference in 1 Peter.

The fact that Silvanus worked closely with both Paul and Peter shows the theological closeness of Paul and Peter. Although their theology was compatible, the way of expressing that theology is very different. There are some people today who try to make us believe that Paul and Peter were at odds theologically. This disproves that assertion. There was no schism in the early church between Paul and Peter. There was a clear, cordial alliance between them.

Silvanus probably penned the epistle of 1 Peter. Peter may have penned the conclusion by his own hand. It was a general practice that writers of Scripture to use amanuenses (secretaries) to write their epistles (Galatians 6:11-18; 1 Corinthians 16:21-23; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18).

Silvanus stands in similar relationship to Peter that he did to Paul. After ministering with Paul as a secretary, he joins Peter's ministry. Paul was probably in prison by then. Silvanus was conversant with and known to the churches to whom 1 Peter is addressed (1 Peter 1:1). They knew what kind of man he was. They recognized his character.

The Scripture doesn't record any word from Silas. This affirms the importance of subordinate work. One little chip in a computer can cause the computer to stop operating. There is an importance to little things. Little things are indispensable to ministry. No doubt, some people will receive more glory in Christian work than others will. Glory, however, is not how God measures things. God places value on our faithfulness to the role He gives us.

Principle

God uses unknown, unsung believers for His glory.

Application

Who has thought much of this man Silvanus? The two greatest missionaries of the first century were Paul and Peter. Both of these mighty missionaries depended on Silvanus. Neither Paul nor Peter could have done what they did without him. He was their right-hand man.

Silvanus was available for God's use. It did not matter whether he was the underdog. He played second fiddle to both Paul and Peter. He did not seek glory for himself, but only for his Lord. That is why he could serve the way he did.

Paul and Peter were the "stars" of the first-century community. God left to the lot of Silvanus to be a satellite to move around the greater orbs. If God calls you to this lot, will you willingly accept it?

May God give us many more like Silvanus.

"Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him

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are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:17-20).

A principle in the nation Israel was that some were to "stand by the stuff." "As his part is that goes down into battle, so shall his part be that carries by the stuff; they shall part alike." Stand by the stuff in your service for the Lord!

and Timothy,

Paul led Timothy to Christ as a young man (1 Timothy 1:2) on his first missionary expedition (Acts 13-14). Timothy's father was Gentile (Acts 16:1) and his mother Eunice was a Jew turned Christian (2 Timothy 1:5). He joined Paul on his second missionary expedition.

Upon the writing of 1 Thessalonians, Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica with a report about the state of the church there (3:1-6).

Timothy was a vest-pocket edition of the apostle Paul. He was Paul's companion on many of his travels (2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and his son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:1). Timothy had a Gentile father (Acts 16:1) but a Jewish mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). They taught him the Old Testament from a young age (2 Timothy 3:15).

Paul hand-picked Timothy to serve with him. Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey at Lystra, where he was reported to be effective in ministry (Acts 16:2). Thereafter they were almost inseparable. Wherever Paul went, he took Timothy. Wherever Paul could not go, he sent Timothy. "Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Corinthians 16:10). Paul personally polished him as a leader. He addressed 1 & 2 Timothy to this young pastor.

Paul had numerous colleagues and friends but none of them was quite as close as Timothy. Note his view of Timothy in Philippians 2:10-23, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send

Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus [but not Timothy]. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me."

God brought these two men together and they remained together. Their friendship made them as one. Their friendship glued them together with a divine adhesive. Others forsook Paul, but Timothy remained loyal. When the going got tough, they quit:

"This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (2 Timothy 1:15).

Paul knew what it was like to have some bitter disappointments in his friends and co-workers.

What kept Paul and Timothy together? It seems they had little in common. Paul was much older than Timothy (Philemon 9).

In 1 Timothy, Paul said, "Let no man despise your youth." Usually, people separated by a large gap in age do not remain together for very long unless they are relatives.

Paul and Timothy also had different family backgrounds. Paul was a pure blood Jew (Philippians 3:5). Timothy was half-Jew, half-Gentile. His father was a Gentile (Acts 16:3). He was a mongrel. He was neither Jew nor Gentile, fish nor fowl.

Moreover, Paul and Timothy's education was not at par. They were on different planes. Paul had the equivalent of a graduate degree today. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). There is no record of any formal training for Timothy. But here, these men were together--Jesus Christ made the difference.

Here was an old man and a young man serving together who had little in common. Yet, there was one thing that brought them together--the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ eradicated the distance

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that separated them. This was a beautiful fellowship.

Principle

God breaks down natural barriers between people.

Application

Although people come from radically different backgrounds, they can serve the Lord side by side. Paul mentored Timothy by personal involvement with him. Everything he learned, he learned from Paul. Timothy was both loyal and faithful. Jesus Christ compensates for the differences in culture, education, and financial background. He annihilates the differences that may separate us.

Paul's relationships with Silvanus and Timothy indicate something of his commitment to discipling others, both in Christian living and in service.

To the church of the Thessalonians

The word "church" means called out ones. Paul calls this church by the name of the physical location of the city – "the church of the Thessalonians." The word "church" carries the idea of an assembly. Not every gathering of religious people is a church. There were a number of "assemblies" in the city of Thessalonica. Cults gathered around the gods of the pantheon.

Ancient labor unions gathered behind the ideology of their craft.

This gospel team of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy traveled over the Roman Empire starting churches. After they started a church, they turned the leadership over to local people to continue indigenously the work in their area. These churches became self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating after he left. The Thessalonians, as we shall see, not only reached their own area but much of the Roman Empire.

The Thessalonian church was born on Paul's second missionary expedition. The second

missionary expedition began out of a crisis between two team members at the close of Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas had a full-fledged feud over John Mark joining the team. John had defected from the previous mission and Paul would have no more of him. Paul and Barnabas broke up their team over him, Barnabas taking Mark with him. Silvanus joined Paul's team and they left for Antioch, Paul's home base.

After Antioch, the team moved east to Lystra where they singled out another team member, Timothy. The team of three moved from Lystra going Northwest to the city of Troy, in Northeast Turkey today. In Troy, Paul received a vision to go to Macedonia. They crossed the Aegean Sea into the continent of Europe. This was Europe's first exposure to the gospel. At this point Luke the physician joined the team (Luke changes from "they" to "we" in the book of Acts). Now the gospel team had four members: Paul, Barnabas, Timothy and Luke.

The team landed in the city of Philippi, in the province of Macedonia. There they led Lydia to Christ. They ran into conflict with the city officials and were beaten and cast into prison. With bleeding backs, they fled Philippi and went about a hundred miles to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1,2). The team spent at least three weeks there, maybe much longer. Paul reasoned with them for three Sabbath days out of the Scriptures (Acts 17:3). There was no convert there before he came, but he left many Christians when he departed. They got out of town by night.

The team left Thessalonica and moved into Berea (Acts 17:10). They left there and went to Athens (Acts 17:17). In Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica because he heard that they were under frightful persecution. Timothy troubleshooted the situation and came back to Corinth with a report for Paul. Timothy told Paul how the Thessalonian believers stood up boldly to abuse.

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth in response to Timothy's report, about a year after he left the city of Thessalonica.

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In this book, Paul gives details of the church, the Rapture and future issues. Since some died in persecution, Paul writes of their future resurrection.

Principle

Every church has a history.

Application

The history of local churches is interesting. Why did it start? What drove those who launched the church? We can find the history of the Thessalonian church in Acts 17:1ff. It became an outstanding church of the New Testament. Do you know the history of your local church? Did your church start on biblical principles? Most churches start with a passion to reach those in their community for Christ.

Timothy brought back from Thessalonica both a positive report and a negative report about the state of the church to Paul in Corinth. Some believers sold their businesses and houses because they thought that Jesus was coming almost immediately.

Persecution distorted some of their thinking (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4). Some of them caused trouble in the church because they did not accept the appointed leadership that Paul established when he left (1 Thessalonians 5:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,7,11). The purpose of this epistle is to correct some of these misconceptions.

This church not only had a physical address [Thessalonica] but it had a spiritual address as well -- "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The church and individual Christians are "in God" (Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 John 4:15). Nothing can happen to us unless God allows it to happen.

The word "in" indicates a sphere. A Christian lives in a sphere, the sphere of God and Christ. We have life in God and Christ, therefore, we are secure in God's providence. The term "Father" centers our thinking on God's sovereign care of the believer.

In the city of Thessalonica was a group of people who believed that Jesus gave them eternal life by His death on the cross (Acts 17:1-7). Although they believed in Him, they did not trust Him fully. They were full of anxiety about the future.

and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Jesus is equally God as the Father is God (Acts 17:3). Paul does not use the title Savior. He uses the term "Lord" in this context because he places emphasis on His deity. "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father who has sent Him." We live in a day when Christians use the title "God" but not the title "Jesus Christ" because "Jesus Christ" is more offensive than "God." People love to talk about God, but they hate Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus is God and Creator who sustains the universe (John 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:15f; Hebrews 1:1-2). By calling attention to the "Father" and deity of Jesus Christ, Paul shows that the persecution the Thessalonians endure is completely in the hand of God. Nothing can happen to them that is random. Everything is in God's plan for the universe.

Principle

Christians are invulnerable and immortal in their physical life, until God decides to promote them to glory.

Application

Christians should not fear anything that comes their way, because God manages all that happens to us. In this case, the entire church of Thessalonica was "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

When God boxes us into His sphere like this, nothing can happen to us that is outside of His will. The Devil tried to get at Job (Job 1), but God put a hedge about him. Even the Devil cannot get through that hedge without God's permission. God's providence in our life gives us point, purpose, and protection.

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Knowledge of God's providence will keep us from a nervous breakdown. We can move through life with a confidence in God's care for us (1 John 4:4;5:4). We are invulnerable until God chooses to allow something to come into our life.

Grace to you

Paul gives his customary greeting of "grace" and "peace" here. Grace always precedes peace in these greetings. That is because God's provisions always precede the impact of peace on our lives.

Grace is God's provision for us because of the death of Christ for our sins. God is the source for all our provisions. We do not earn nor deserve His gifts. We do not deserve anything from God. All we deserve is hell. Nothing undermines self-effort more than the grace of God.

The Bible personifies Jesus as "grace."

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men..." (Titus 2:11).

Principle

Grace glorifies God because God does the doing.

Application

If people do the doing, they get the glory. If God does the doing, then God gets the glory. Grace glorifies God, because God does the doing.

"Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:5-6).

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

We have the right to come to the "throne of grace." We have the right to pray, not because

of something in ourselves, but because of who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross.

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each Christian has peace with God, but not all Christians have the peace of God. We churn inside because we do not see God's sovereign hand upon our lives. We are so anxious and exercised about life that you would think God committed suicide. We do not say, "I am full of anxiety" because we know that that does not sound spiritual. We say, "I am exercised about this...." That sounds more spiritual but it bypasses acceptance of God's sovereign protection of our life.

To gain peace biblically, we must soak our minds with the Word of God and prayer. Biblical peace is the ability to sit down on the inside.

"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

We can tell God about our problems and thus have peace that He will handle them for our good.

The Holy Spirit produces peace in our lives when we allow Him to control our lives.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Principle

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Peace is the consequence of appropriating grace to our life.

Application

Peace is the consequence of appropriating grace to our life. We cannot reverse this order. If we bypass grace, we cannot possibly have peace in our life.

We can have neither grace nor peace without accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we have a personal relationship with Him, we have His grace and thus His peace.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (1 Thessalonians 5:28).

Both the Father and Son are the source of grace. Christians must live their life based on grace. We cannot live the supernatural Christian life on our own resources. If we draw upon God's resources, we will possess His peace. Grace and peace are a couplet. We cannot have one without the other.

Before anyone can become a Christian, he or she must believe in an irreducible minimum of the gospel. No unbeliever can have true peace without accepting Jesus as his Savior.

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace,' Says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:20-21)

1 Thessalonians 1:2

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers..."

Verse two is the beginning of the body of the epistle.

We give thanks to God

We can tell a man's values by what he appreciates. Paul and his team constantly expressed their gratitude for God's operation in their lives.

Most books of the New Testament begin with some form of thanksgiving but Paul could not bring himself thank God for the Galatians

because of their serious doctrinal aberration. He even gave thanks for the church at Corinth and that took some doing!

always

The gospel team gave thanks "always." Paul's gospel team constantly gave thanks for God's work through others. This will deliver us from much discouragement. All of us have many discouraging things come our way.

"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

Principle

What we appreciate reveals our values. We need to stay in constant communication with God in prayer.

Application

Some churches are discussion groups. They care little about truth; they care more about everyone giving their viewpoints about truth. Other churches are mere country clubs where socialization takes precedence over edifying one another or sharing the gospel with the world. Still other groups debate political or public issues and give only a squirt of religious perfume to their crowd.

The church at Thessalonica was a true church. You could hear the Word of God there. You saw them strengthen each other in their faith. You watched them share Christ not only with their own city, but also with the whole Mediterranean world. They did not spend much time discussing the dreadful state of affairs in the Roman Empire and there were many abuses in the Empire. They talked about strategy for winning the Roman Empire for Christ. They dealt with important things like sin and salvation, Heaven and Hell.

Do you put priority on God's values?

The gospel team sometimes did not take time to dial; the receiver was off the hook much of the time. They had a good connection to

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heaven. They were in constant close communication with the throne room.

"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Samuel 12:23).

"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

"Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:164).

"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Romans 12:12).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..." (Ephesians 6:18).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..." (Colossians 4:2).

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

"...pray without ceasing..." (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

for you all,

The Gospel team gave thanks not only for the honorable believers at Thessalonica, but for all believers at that church. We do not have to approve of Christians to pray for them. They do not have to answer to us before we can pray for them. God simply calls us to pray for "all" Christians. Thank God that they came to Christ. Thank God for any contribution they make to the cause of Christ.

making mention of you in our prayers

The word "prayers" signifies invocation. This is a more general term than the term "petition." Paul is saying that he makes mention of them in

prayer. He calls people by name in prayer. This is the only good - gossip on your knees!

Paul loved God's people enough to pray specifically for them by name. Prayer takes memory. How many fellow Christians do you remember in prayer? Paul says in the next verse – "remembering without ceasing...."

Principle

Thanksgiving is the capacity to appreciate what God is doing in our lives.

Application

God is the author of all that is good. Thanksgiving is the capacity to appreciate God's goodness to us - even the disagreeable things that happen to us. We come to realize that everything that God allows to come into our lives, He does for our good (Romans 8:28).

When we give thanks, we give something to God. We can give money to God, but we owe Him thanks as well.

"...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 5:20).

"...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (Colossians 1:12).

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

Do you daily thank God for your salvation? Your health. Your church and your pastor who feed you the Word of God? Thank God for each believer you know who is a walking representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. Granted, not everyone represents Him well, but there is some semblance of Christ in them. There are so many places where there is divine dearth; there is no witness, no vitality, no evangelism and no momentum. We need every witness we can find.

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Thank God for every movement of evangelism in the world. Do you thank God for anyone besides your husband or wife or children? Of course, it is easier to thank God for some than for others, but this passage says to give thanks for "all" Christians. How many people do you pray for? Apart from your family, for whom do you pray? Do you pray for those who are advancing the cause of Christ?

The church at Thessalonica was born out of affliction. Out of the crucible of affliction came strong churches.

Paul had a prayer list – do you?

1 Thessalonians 1:3

"...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father..."

Believers at Thessalonica had three features. These distinctives enabled them to have the greatest impact of any church in the New Testament, and were the source of their spiritual vitality. remembering without ceasing

The word "remembering" means to call to mind. Paul calls to mind the circumstance for giving thanks. We need to kindle our memory so that we do not neglect prayer. Here Paul and his team remember three outstanding spiritual virtues of the Thessalonians.

The character and convictions of the Thessalonians brought them regularly to minds of Paul's team when they went to prayer. The entire chapter is born out of the memory of a dynamic church. This is a church that manifested work, labor and patience motivated by faith, love and hope.

Principle

True ministry comes from spiritual qualities.

Application

Faith, love and hope are fruits of the Spirit. It is possible to do God's work in carnality. To work,

labor and exercise perseverance without God's power is empty human mechanics.

The church at Ephesus manifested work, labor and perseverance but still received rebuke from the Lord.

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place— unless you repent," (Revelation 2:2-5).

If we operate under the power of the Holy Spirit, we will do God's work in God's power. As the root, so the fruit. If we do what we do in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will produce like fruit.

your work of faith,

The first virtue of the Thessalonians is their work produced by their faith.

The Thessalonians' work sprang from their faith. Faith occasions their work. Faith originates one's work. Their work was the achievement of their faith. In the hall of fame chapter [Hebrews 11], we see many believers that did many exploits by faith. Their belief bore fruit. True work always originates in faith.

"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.... But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which

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says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also," (James 2:18-26).

Look at your works, your production in life. Now look at your faith. Is there any connection between the two? The argument of the book of James is that faith works. True faith shows itself in works. Abraham demonstrated his faith by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac so he justified his faith in the eyes of people.

God is not the one who justifies in the book of James. People justify us if we walk by faith. Rahab believed God's promises by faith when Israel crossed the Red Sea but it was not until forty years later that she demonstrated her faith to the Israelites by hiding the spies. Rahab vindicated the reality of her faith to Israel by hiding those spies. We can measure our faith by what we do.

Principle

Our faith motivates our work.

Application

A faith that is dynamic, active and real rather than static and lifeless will produce work.

The essential element to faith is its focus. If the object of our faith is credible, then we can trust that article of belief. Faith claims the promises of God. When we claim the promises of God, God changes our lives. The Thessalonians turned to God from idols.

Faith rests upon the work of God, not our work. When we rest on God's work, God produces His work in us.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not

I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

We can work by our own effort or we can work under the power of God. A contractor can carry the bricks of the new house up the scaffold himself or he can get others to do it. The resources of his business allow him to hire others to do the work. Every Christian has the capital of God's resources. The difference between believers is not that some have capital and others do not. The difference lies in the fact that some use their resources and others do not. When we utilize our assets from God, we will produce divine results. We use our assets by faith.

Why do people do what they do? The motivation of some is for very selfish reasons. They do what they do for adulation, fame, for prestige and distinction or for making an impact of some kind on life. This verse says that our motivation should come from our faith. Later in the chapter, Paul says that the believers at Thessalonica carried their faith to the entire Roman world.

Many people have little faith in what God can do by Christian leadership. What dynamic Christian would want to attend a church or become involved in an organization that does not operate by faith? I would not.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

There are two ways to attempt to work for God: our way or God's way. If we produce work without God, then it is hollow human work. If we do not serve the Lord by faith, we serve in the flesh. We do it "our way," not God's way.

Doing God's work my way and doing His work His way, may appear to be the same but it is not. God will not reward works motivated by selfish interests. God's work done in God's way will receive God's blessing. If we serve the Lord out of motivation to please Him and do it His way, then He will bless it. Faith always

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produces genuine work for God. It is a work produces by faith (1 Corinthians 13:11f).

labor of love,

The second virtue of the Thessalonians is their love. The Greek says, "your labor, the one out of love." Love impelled their labor. Biblical love is more than sentiment. Love is not sweetness. We confuse cultural love with true biblical love. Agape love is willing to sacrifice for others. It is others oriented. To love sacrificially is to labor until it hurts.

The word "labor" means labor to the point of exhaustion. It is a love of blood, sweat and tears. Self-sacrificial love moves us to labor. This love is willing to toil and to pay a price. Love activates arduous labor. Love prompts this tough grind.

"But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises," (Hebrews 6:9-12).

Principle

Love reaches to the extent of self-denial.

Application

Everything we receive as Christians, we receive by grace. We do not work for either our salvation or for blessings within the Christian life. Unless we are ungrateful, we appreciate and love the Lord Jesus for all that He provides for us. We want to show our gratitude for all that He has done. We will give ourselves till it hurts. We will endure a lot of pain to tell others about Him and His provisions. Our labor for the Lord only dims when Calvary dims to us and we forget the cost of our salvation.

What is your labor of love? Do you engage in some challenging labor for the Lord? Do you lead a small group because of your appreciation for the Lord? Will you allow the Lord to put a harness of service on you?

Many of us serve the Lord nine to five. We do not go out of our way to serve Him. If it is convenient, we will serve Him. This may indicate that we do not truly love Him.

Are you willing to hurt for others? Are you open to give sweat for the Lord Jesus? People who truly love Him labor to the point of utter exhaustion. We say, "Well, I have a husband, a wife or children. I do not have time to give to God." Do you have a Lord? Marriage relationships and parental relationship are important in God's economy. We must put high priority on them, but some of us use relationships as reasons for not putting sweat into the cause of Christ. Relationships primarily have to do with communication. If our communication breaks down then we will not have proper relationships. The real issue is communication, not time. Time is an illusion for the real problem. The real issue is cherishing your wife or respecting your husband. Those are the true issues.

How would you score yourself on the first two motivations for ministry? Very few people truly give themselves for the cause of Christ. Are you willing to put your all into serving the Lord?

Those who avoid trouble, love little.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

and patience of hope

The third and final virtue of the Thessalonians is hope. Hope has to do with the future. The Thessalonians endurance came from their confidence in God's provisions for eternity.

People who exercise hope do not operate on baseless optimism or wishful thinking. The idea of hope in the Bible is the idea of confidence, assurance and certainty. This person has

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confidence that God will keep all His promises despite every appearance to the contrary. This kind of hope produces steadfast endurance through trouble. This hope helps the believer bear up under any trial that may come his way.

"For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" (Romans 8:24).

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1).

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. "Hope" is a very difficult word to translate into English because it carries the idea of confidence. The English word transmits the idea of wishful thinking. We say, "I hope it does not rain tomorrow." We mean by that, "I wish it does not rain tomorrow." Biblical hope is no wish. It does not produce the idea of "I have these wonderful plans that people all over the world will come to Christ. I hope it works out." No, hope has the idea that we have assurance in the future because of who God is.

The word "patience" comes from two Greek words: under and to remain. A person who has patience is one who remains under, continues under the pressure. This person does not give up no matter what may come his way. This is the quality of perseverance. However, this term does not simply convey unadulterated perseverance but a perseverance that goes beyond resignation to problems. It endures with a quality of life.

Our English word "patience" carries the idea of passiveness or lack of activity. The Greek word for "patience" means fortitude, steadfastness and tenacity. Hope produces tenacity. A person who carries great hope hangs in there. He carries the character of steadfastness.

Hope helps us claim the promises of God. The problems we currently face do not daunt us

because we see beyond the moment. People who want to advance the cause of Christ in the world cannot give up. They must possess bulldog stick-to-it-iveness. They must grab hold of what God wants in the world and hold onto it. These people never give up although they may fail many times. They get up and try again. They hang in there. Few people possess this kind of vision.

Principle

Perseverance flows from hope.

Application

The quality of life that produces perseverance is confidence in God's plan for our lives. God's providence in the present and His prospect for our future, give Christians an edge on others.

"And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:13-18).

Is this operation bootstraps? Is this unadulterated self effort?

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been

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poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Are we talking about operation bootstraps when people exercise tenacity? Biblical hope is no sheer human determination based on blind fate. This is hope based on confidence in God and His promises. This is tenacity inspired by hope.

A commodity that Christians have that the vast majority of other people in the world do not have is confidence in the future. Man hates confidence because it gives lie to relativism. Relativism, the idea that nothing is true for sure, is the great hope of the non-believing. The more is the pity. Jesus is the only hope for man. That is fighting words to most people today but it is the truth.

People who carry confidence intimidate many people. They presume that confident people are arrogant. Most people doubt themselves so confident people intimidate them. They fear risks.

On the human level, confidence is a basis for success. Confident people know what they are doing and where they are going. They do not demonstrate sheer superficial confidence based on some vacuous air, "I am a confident person, I will do so and so." No, they base their confidence on competence, research, and understanding. At the Christian level, we base our confidence on very deep convictions about God's promises.

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

How many times have people said that something would not work when confident people go out and do it anyway? Confident people generally are not more competent but they believe more. Others around may make them feel inept and incompetent.

Confident people can unknowingly intimidate other people. The problem with people who

allow others to intimidate them is pride. Rather than launch out on their own they would rather swim in self-pity. They would rather fight those who are confident rather than initiate their own sphere of influence.

Paul now points to the persons that produce the three sets of character in verse three.

in our Lord Jesus Christ

Our hope rests in the future coming of Christ (v.10). This hope looks beyond present problems. It looks to the permanent solution Christ will bring.

The three prime virtues of this verse are found in two spheres: 1) "in our Lord Jesus Christ" and 2) "in the sight of our God and Father." The reason Christians do what they do is because of Jesus Christ and because God the Father watches them. These two dynamics motivated church at Thessalonica and Christians in our day.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1)

There is no true hope apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. People try to be optimistic without anything to base their optimism on. Leaders hope against hope. Christians rest our hope on the veracity of God's promises.

Note the word "our." This personalizes our hope. The Lord Jesus Christ is mine so I have hope. Jesus is an historical figure to many people but to those who come to trust Him personally for salvation, they place confidence in him experientially. You must be His and He must be yours.

Our passage says that that confidence comes from a person – "in the Lord Jesus Christ." The word "in" means sphere. The sphere of our confidence is in the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Principle

Our confidence rests in our personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

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Application

One day we will stand before God the Father with confidence. That confidence will be because of Jesus Christ. When we stand in His sphere, therefore, God will accept us because of Him. Our confidence is not going to be in who we are or what we have done. We will not look back over our lives and say, "Oh, I blew it. I failed terribly there." No, we base our confidence on who Jesus is and what He did for our sins on the cross. That is liberating!

People who constantly rue the past and think about their failures cannot think about the future. They are more consumed with their failure than they are with giving to others. They allow subjective guilt to destroy the potential of how God would use them. Guilt blunts the momentum of Christianity. These people stand in who and what they are. No wonder they lack confidence! They need to confess their sin and move to greater heights in serving the Lord.

Personal momentum produces intrinsic momentum. Personal confidence produces ministry confidence. We need to get out of self, out of our problems. We need to get out of subjectivity and into the objectivity of God's promises.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

"Oh, you mean that the power does not reside in me?" For sure! The concern is that we do not have confidence in what the gospel can do. We do not believe in the power of the gospel. When a non-Christian is intransigent, implacable and immovable toward the gospel, what do we do? Give up? The believer who has confidence in the power of the gospel trusts God to use His Word to change stubborn hearts. The power is in the gospel, not in the one who delivers the gospel.

Many of us try to justify the gospel or excuse the gospel. That is as if when a thief comes to our house and we meet him with a .45-calibre

handgun and we say, "I just want you to understand the power of his gun. It can blow a hole right through you." We do not have to justify the gun; all we have to do is pull the trigger. All we have to do is present the gospel message. God will do the rest.

Confidence in the power of the gospel has to do with perspective. If we give excuses for the gospel, we do not have confidence in the gospel. Confident people will introduce people to Christ. They will not avoid asking people to make a decision for Christ.

Most people are hung up on themselves. They drag the past around with them. If we drag all our failures and foibles and inconsistencies around with us, how effective are we going to be? We will not be very effective. Our confidence is not in ourselves; it is in Christ.

Momentum comes from a faith that inspires, from a love that motivates and from a confidence that rouses us to action.

in the sight of our God and Father

Christians should do what we do under God's eye. God has sight. He is not blind. He sees everything we do for Him.

"Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" (Genesis 16:13).

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

"But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'" (Galatians 3:11).

"For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from

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God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:17).

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Some people do not have the slightest idea that God sees them. They could care less. Those who love Him want to please Him because they know that He sees everything they do. God knows our sorrow and disappointment. He sees our need. He knows our desires.

Again, as with the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul calls God "our" Father. This is also a term of relationship. God is more than our Maker or Creator. A Father cares for His children (Galatians 3:26).

Each of the triad of virtues revolves around a personal relationship with the Son and the Father.

Principle

Christians should not live for the appearances of men but under the eye of God.

Application

Christians exercise faith, hope and love not for men but for God. Ultimately, God will search our hearts. Before men, we operate for the most part on appearances. Before God, things will be what they truly are.

1 Thessalonians 1:4

"...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God"

Paul's thanksgiving not only involves recalling their spiritual virtues but it also embraces knowledge of their election. The Thessalonians have every earmark of the elect.

knowing,

The response of the Thessalonians to the gospel is clear evidence of their salvation. The three graces of the previous verse of faith, love

and hope flow from the underpinning of election.

Christians must know some things (Romans 6:6; James 1:3; 2 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:3) before they can live out God's truth. We are what we eat physically; we are what we believe spiritually. God's truth will never reach our heart if it does not first get into our head. Christian truth begins in the head and then moves to the heart.

Every Christian has a built-in Bible teacher, the Holy Spirit. He will enable us to understand God's Word. How can we go awry? The Devil will attempt to get us off on doctrinal tangents. He will help us maintain our biblical equilibrium.

beloved brethren,

Paul used the term "brethren" fifteen times in this epistle (1:4; 2:1, 9, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25-27) and seven times in 2 Thessalonians (1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13). "Brethren" means out of the same womb. They were clearly his peers in Christ.

In addition, Paul calls the Thessalonians "beloved." The Greek renders this phrase "beloved by God." "Beloved" is a favorite name for those who are God's own (2 Thessalonians 2:13). He never calls those without Christ by this term. Our relationship to one another in Christ comes from our common election by God.

The Greek indicates that God began loving us in the past with the result that He established a precedent of loving us. You may feel that few people love you. You may even feel sorry for yourself. However, God loves us with unadulterated, unconditional and undying love. This love will never let us go. He loved us so much that He personally sent His only Son to die on the cross for us.

You are the personal object of His love. He loves us with the same love that He loves the Lord Jesus.

Principle

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God loves us with an undaunted, undying, unadulterated and unconditional love.

Application

Everything begins by God's love for us (John 3:16). When we learn the incredible truth that God loves us by sending His only Son to die on the cross for us, we can only marvel (Romans 5:6,8). God has a different love for His own than those who do not believe in Him.

your election by God

God selected some Thessalonians for salvation. The word "election" means that God chose to select some to eternal life (Ephesians 1:4-6,11; Colossians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). It is also true that God expects individuals to make a decision to rely on Christ's death on the cross for their salvation.

Scripture teaches both God's responsibility and man's response. That God decided to choose some Thessalonians for salvation is clear from the accomplishment of Paul's team preaching among them. The gospel is no invention of man; it is a divine action coming with God's power (Romans 1:16). God calls many but He only elects a few.

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

"Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness..." (Titus 1:1).

We have the haughty idea that we chose God when in reality He took the initiative to save us.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined,

these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies" (Romans 8:29-33).

Only God has the prerogative of election. Why would He select you or me? Only He knows. He could have done better. He could have chosen someone better looking, more brilliant or beautiful than us, but He did not. He chose us. That, we cannot understand. We may never understand it, even in eternity.

God, in His omniscience, chose you and me to be with Him for eternity. He tracked us down and brought the gospel to us. If we have nothing else for which we can thank God, we should thank Him for this. You are one of the few. Most go the broad way to destruction.

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

God also calls us. "Calls" is term of election. God calls us through the gospel. God draws us to Himself by the gospel. God uses His servants to bring His election to us.

"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).

We see both the divine and the human side of salvation – God elects; human beings "obtain." That is why we must get the gospel to people so they can respond to the ministry of the Holy Spirit to receive the gospel. Neither ministry infringes on the other. It is wrong to emphasize one without the other. We hold to both truths simultaneously. We leave it to God to resolve the difference in eternity. He will synchronize His sovereignty with our responsibility.

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"...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love..." (Ephesians 1:4).

"...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Principle

Election is not a cold, impersonal doctrine.

Application

Everyone who receives salvation is elected. We can see our election by the fruit in our lives. God is the source for anything that comes of our salvation. Election is not a cold, impersonal doctrine.

We know God elected us when we sense His drawing us to Himself. The Holy Spirit awakens a desire within us. When we come to the realization that we cannot change ourselves on our own, our hearts draw near to God. "No one can come to me except my Father draw him."

1 Thessalonians 1:5

"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake"

Another basis for Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonians is the way the gospel came to them in supernatural power. Their ready reception of God's message shows the reality of God in their midst.

For

The word "for" means because. Paul now expresses the basis for his assurance of the salvation of the Thessalonians.

our gospel

The word "gospel" is emphatic in the Greek. It is the message itself and not the act of preaching that changes lives. The word "gospel" means good news. It is the good news of eternal salvation.

The first token of the election of the Thessalonians is not in the way the Thessalonians received the gospel but in the mode the evangelists presented it. God's election of them was sovereign, not arbitrary. God uses human agents to impart His gospel. God uses a special sort of courier to communicate His message – those who exercise His power. These communicators come with certain qualifications presented later in this verse.

Principle

The power of our message is in the message, not the messenger.

Application

The nature of the gospel is one of the greatest treasures God ever gave His creatures. It is a gospel of unadulterated grace (Acts 20:24). God did everything necessary so that we can live with Him in eternity. The Devil specializes in starting his own religions. All religions carry the same message: "Man is good; man must lift himself by his own bootstraps; he must improve himself; he should find himself; he should chose any religion for they all lead to Heaven."

Religions impart noble ideas that appeal to something within man but they are fatal when it comes to a relationship with God. Only the gospel can establish an eternal relationship with God. A pluralistic society tunes this out because it is foreign to their ears. That is the very hurdle each person must reach, if they want eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

did not come to you

The word "not" in the Greek implies that this is a downright fact. The following statements

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about how the gospel came into Thessalonica are facts.

in word only,

The word "in" in the phrase "in word only" expresses sphere. The message of the gospel team is more than oratory and orthodoxy; it is a living, transforming message. The gospel team came, communicating in the sphere of speaking the content of the gospel message.

The gospel came to the Thessalonians first through verbal communication. Verbal communication is an essential element in gospel presentation. Saying "I am living the life before them" is not enough. We can live the life from now to doomsday, but that would not be enough to win people to Christ. We must declare the facts of the gospel.

"...who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14).

Any further content to the gospel message is irrelevant, secondary and inconsequential. We spend so much time approaching people with the gospel that we never get to the gospel message. We spend too much time on means, rather than on ends. Consequently, people do not catch the opportunity to make a decision for Christ. The means is not the end!

Principle

We must communicate the gospel with more than Christian life; we must do it with our lips as well, if we are going to significantly advance the cause of Christ.

Application

We need words to communicate the gospel. Today, many Christians never get down to the message. They live the life, but they do not speak the words of the gospel.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?..."
"...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14, 17).

If we are going to get serious about spreading the gospel effectively, we must first give people content to believe. We must set forth the gospel in clear terms. The only way to do this is with words. Everything is secondary to the proclamation of God's saving message. If we spend all of our time on the means and never come to the end, then we will never reach the world for Christ. We can contextualize the gospel into oblivion, but if people never hear the message, they will never embrace the Savior.

only

Note the word "only." We must speak the gospel verbally but not in words only. The book of Acts makes this abundantly clear.

However, the gospel involves more than communication of its content. The spoken word is necessary, but it is not enough if it stands alone. It might be possible to teach a parrot to speak the words of the gospel. Anyone can mechanically give out the facts of the gospel. There is more to the gospel than presenting unadulterated facts.

Verse five sets forth four indispensable factors that make the gospel a tour de force. Each of these four factors is crucial for effective evangelism. Each feature begins by the word "in." The four uses of "in" in this verse show what makes the gospel effective.

but also

The word "but" is emphatic in the Greek. The Holy Spirit wants us to see that the gospel is more than careful clarification of its facts. The presentation of the gospel requires three more divine features: "power," "the Holy Spirit" and "much assurance." There is a spiritual vibrancy to the gospel.

The word "also" indicates that there is something more than just explaining the gospel when we share our faith. The impact of gospel presentation is not solely in words. There are three further spiritual dynamics to the gospel. God uses certain spiritual forces to shape us.

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Principle

When all four divine factors in this verse are in operation, the gospel moves out with great power.

Application

A gospel presentation will not be effective unless all four spheres are integrated: articulating the gospel in words, relying on its power, depending on the Holy Spirit to convict people, and delivering it with great confidence. We restrict the dynamics of the gospel if we employ only two of these spheres. Three are better but we need all four dynamic spheres if we want to make a full impact.

If we dial only three numbers on a safe whose combination has four, it will not open. We need to dial all four numbers to open the safe. Similarly we need to execute all four spheres mentioned in this verse to make the greatest impact with the gospel. We do not need to blast open the safe when we use the combination. We gently pull open the door.

The Word without the Spirit is dead orthodoxy. The Spirit without the Word is fanaticism.

in power,

We have the word "in" a second of four times in this verse. Each mention is an advance on the previous "in."

The manner in which the Thessalonians received the gospel was in the sphere of "power." The gospel team delivered their message in a powerful manner – in the sphere of the power of God.

The word "power" is the word for inherent power. The gospel message came in God's inherent power, power that is inherent to God. Power latent in God is real and compelling. This power goes beyond human capacity because it influences men.

The message the gospel team preached was more than human oratory, for it came in the power of God (Romans 1:16). Mere accuracy in communicating the gospel is not enough. The

Thessalonians not only heard the message from human lips but the power of the gospel message impacted them.

When we present the gospel in power, it compels and grips those without Christ. The reason the gospel compels the lost is because it is real. It transforms hundreds of thousands of lives. Jesus lives today in Heaven and He lives in the hearts of people today. The gospel changed the Thessalonians too. They were different for having exposed themselves to the gospel.

Principle

The gospel carries the inherent power of God with it.

Application

The gospel is not drab, dull or ineffective if we engage its inherent power. God will use the inherent power of the gospel to cause those without Christ to embrace the Son of God.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God'" (Matthew 22:29).

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

and in the Holy Spirit

The third occurrence of the word "in" is "in the Holy Spirit." The gospel team came in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled the gospel communicators, who operated under His influence. They clothed themselves with the Holy Spirit when they communicated the gospel.

The gospel coming to Thessalonica was a supernatural work by God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8). We

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attribute salvation ultimately to the Holy Spirit. The dynamic impact of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary to win people to Christ. We cannot engage His dynamic power with allowing Him to fill or control us.

Not only did the gospel come in the power of its message but also it came in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can reach into the hearts of people where the mere dead words of man cannot reach. He touches the need of man and links that need to the gospel. The evangelist cannot manipulate this domain. This goes beyond human ability, human gimmick, or human manipulation.

The Holy Spirit can touch the human spirit when no human can do it. He is in charge of operations in the soul. We speak to the ears; the Holy Spirit speaks to the heart. He carries the message to the will.

"And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11).

Principle

The Holy Spirit performs His supernatural work in the heart of those without Christ where the mere dead words of evangelists cannot touch.

Application

The Holy Spirit is in charge of all operations of the gospel. We speak to the ears of people but the Holy Spirit takes what we speak to the heart.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching

were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

and in much assurance,

We have the word "in" for the fourth time in this verse [the "in" is implied here]. The gospel communicators came with conviction when they came to Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians came to full conviction, certain that the gospel was truly from God, because the communicators were true to the Word, came in the power of the message and in the dynamic of the Holy Spirit. They did not waver with doubt. They came with clear convictions. They willingly committed their eternal future to this message.

The gospel moved the will of the Thessalonians and it can move the will of the lost in our day. Not only will it touch the choice but also it will move the person to a point of "much assurance," or full conviction. The gospel will put solid conviction into the souls of those who believe it. Since the Thessalonians knew the power of the gospel by what it had done for them, they had full confidence in it. They were sold on their product. They shared the gospel with authority.

Principle

People who powerfully advance the gospel in the world are people of strong conviction.

Application

Do you know what the gospel did for you, to you and in you? Are you sold on what you believe? Sales people who believe in their product make great communicators. Christians who believe in their message become very effective at advancing the cause of Christ in the world.

Confidence comes from the Holy Spirit. We know He is working through us. Because of this, doubt does not paralyze a person who has faith

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in the Christian message. We carry unfaltering confidence and personal conviction in the power of the Holy Spirit to do His work through us.

Even shy wallflowers and timid mice can be confident in witnessing because of their confidence in the gospel. Once a person meets Jesus Christ, he or she is no longer Mr. or Ms. Ordinary Person. A believer is an ambassador who represents the Lord Jesus Christ and should never share Christ with an apologetic attitude.

How is it possible to apologize for the Son of God? We can communicate with utmost confidence because of what we know about the gospel and its power.

If we are uncertain about what we believe, we will not convince others of our message. If we change our position with every fad or opinion poll, we do not have any message but the message of uncertainty. It is crucial to clarify our personal convictions. If people are unsure about what we believe, they will not accept our message.

as you know

Paul appeals to their personal knowledge of his gospel team. They knew that the gospel team came to them in "word," "power," "the Holy Spirit" and "much assurance."

what kind of men we were among you

Paul's team lived in harmony with the message of the gospel. This is an appeal to the Thessalonians and to us today. People whose lives are consistent with their beliefs are appealing.

The word "kind" in the phrase "kind of men" means sort. The gospel team lived their lives with integrity. They were more than show. God transformed the lives of the communicators of the gospel as well as the Thessalonians. Not only did the gospel team convey a convincing message but they also lived consistent with that message when they were at Thessalonica. The Thessalonians saw clearly their manner of

life. What you are speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.

The word "were" means "became". The transforming power of the way the gospel team came with their message revolutionized the messengers themselves. God enabled them to be what they were not before they came to Thessalonica. God changed them as they shared the gospel.

General Eisenhower illustrated leadership by putting a string on table and saying, "Pull it and it will follow wherever you wish. Push it and will go nowhere at all." We lead people by example.

Credibility comes from the word "credo" meaning "I believe." Credibility means people believe your message because of your integrity. If you do not believe the messenger, you will not believe the message. People expect those who proclaim a message to stand for something and have the courage of their convictions. If we are not clear and convinced about what we believe, others will not believe us either.

Principle

What we are speaks so loud that people cannot hear what we say.

Application

God expects us to live lives of high caliber. What caliber of Christian are you? Are you a shallow soul? Christians are transformed people. There is attraction in that.

"So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'" (Matthew 8:27).

Paul's gospel team was of high quality. They wore well. Against insurmountable opposition, they persisted in living lives of excellence before others. The team was quality merchandise.

Many people use quality as an excuse for not going aggressively after as many people as they can for Christ. There is no choice between quality and quantity in ministry. Quality refers

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to the kind of product we are and the kind of end product what we want to produce. Quantity is the extent we want our ministry to reach. We do not have to choose between quality and quantity. When we go fishing, we do not ask, "Do I want quality or quantity?!" We want to catch the biggest and as many fish as we can! Christians want to win as many people as they can to Christ and we want them to become as much like Christ as possible.

Quality produces quantity. A ministry full of genuinely changed people will attract many others to the ministry. People who possess transformed lives and manifest maturity will draw those without Christ. If we do not draw the lost to our group, or to us personally, is it because we do not demonstrate a good quality of life to them? If our lives do not match the gospel, we will not draw people to us.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Philippians 1:27).

If the quality of our lives do not match the gospel, it will be like switching positive and negative cables on our car battery -- the sparks will fly.

for your sake

God's work done in God's way is always for the sake of the lost. When we do it God's way, it always influences the lost. The gospel team was not in the ministry for themselves. They had no mercenary motive in presenting the gospel. The gospel was for the sake of the Thessalonians.

The gospel team concerned themselves with the kind of product they wanted to produce.

Principle

True communicators of the gospel present the gospel for the sake of the lost, not for their own prestige or recognition.

Application

True communicators of the gospel present the gospel for the sake of the lost, not for their own prestige or recognition. Much ministry today is to advance one's career. We care more about how we deliver ministry than the impact our ministry has on people.

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).