
The Thessalonian Letters

Paul's Thankfulness for the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10



Steve Lewis

www.SpiritAndTruth.org

To the church of the Thessalonians (1:1)

- Parts of an ancient letter:
 - **Signature** ~ the writer
 - **Address** ~ the intended recipients
 - **Salutation** ~ *"I wish you well"*
 - **Ascription of appreciation** ~ thanksgiving
 - **Prayer** for the recipients (in Paul's letters)
 - **Main body** of the letter and final admonitions
- **"church"** (*ekklēsia*, "called out ones") ~ adopted by the early church to mean an assembly of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Lord** (*kurios*) ~ emphasizes Christ's absolute deity; **Jesus** specifies His humanity; **Christ** ("anointed one") identifies Him as the Messiah.
- **"grace"** ~ the unmerited goodness of God toward those who cannot earn and do not deserve His favor.
- **"peace"** ~ the deep inner sense of tranquility and well-being given to those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

We give thanks to God always (1:2)

- He gave thanks **“to God”** who is ultimately responsible for producing the things that are worthy of thanksgiving.
- Paul brought his thoughts, concerns, and desires to God **“always”**
- **“for all of you”** ~ for each and every one.
- **“for”** (*peri*) typically means “around” ~ pictures how Paul was encircling them in prayer.
- **“Prayers”** (*proseuchē*) ~ only used of prayer that is addressed to God.
- **“in”** (*epi*) ~ “upon” the occasion of their prayers. Evidently Paul, Silas, and Timothy would regularly come together for prayer.

Your faith, love, and hope (1:3)

- **“work of faith”** ~ their actions were inspired by their faith in Christ.
What you believe determines how you behave
- **“labor of love”** ~ they were engaged in exhausting toil prompted by their unselfish, sacrificial love.
- **“steadfastness of hope”** ~ their endurance under persecution was motivated by their hope in Christ's return.
- Theirs was a joyful and confident expectation **“in our Lord Jesus Christ”** of the time when He will return to bring believers into **“the presence of God”** ~ Paul will elaborate on this aspect of their hope (1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9)

Knowing His choice of you (1:4)

- **“knowing”** (*oída*) ~ to know something by observation. Paul mentioned several things he had seen in the lives of the Thessalonians which led him to conclude that they are beloved and chosen by God.
- **“choice”** (*eklogē*) conveys the idea of God’s gracious selection of individuals ~ His determination to bless the chosen individual as an expression of His grace alone, apart from any merit in the person chosen.
- Anything of worth in the lives of the Thessalonians is due solely to the fact that God set His love upon them and chose them to belong to Him.
- Paul praised God for the proof of their election which he had observed in the lives of the Thessalonian believers.

Power in the Holy Spirit and full conviction (1:5)

- “**gospel**” (*euaggelion*) ~ “good message” includes the facts concerning Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty for sin, as well as His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God from which He will return to gather His saints.
- Paul focused on the way the gospel message came to them ~ the Holy Spirit worked “**in power**” to assure them of the truth of the message.
- Just as Paul knew by observation that they were chosen by God (1:4), so they “**know**” (*oida*) by observation that Paul’s character and motives were aligned with the powerful working of the Holy Spirit which gave them “**full conviction**” of the truth of his words.

Receiving the word in tribulation with joy (1:6)

- The Thessalonians were so convinced of Paul's noble character that they began to imitate it. **"Imitators"** (*mimētēs*) ~ people who copy or follow the example of someone else.
- Paul added **"and of the Lord"** because he wanted others to imitate him only as he himself was imitating the Lord.
- **"received the word"** ~ they heard, understood, and put their complete trust in the truth of the gospel message.
- **"much tribulation"** (*thlipsis*) ~ intense pressure, affliction, or trouble.
- They responded with unexpected **"joy of the Holy Spirit"** ~ further proof of their status as God's chosen ones.

You became an example to all the believers (1:7-8)

- The way they handled themselves under persecution became a powerful witness to all the believers across the region. As they imitated Paul, they became people whom others could then imitate.
- Christians in remote places were encouraged. If the Thessalonians could endure those circumstances, then maybe they could, too.
- “**sounded forth**” (*exēcheō*) ~ reverberated like a trumpet blast or rolling thunderclap.
- Everything had happened at precisely the right moment in history when news of their story would spread rapidly across the ancient world. This was why Paul needed to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:10).

You turned to God from idols (1:9)

- Paul had said, “**we have no need to say anything**” because wherever they went, the missionaries would be told about the events in Thessalonica before they even had a chance to say anything. Others were telling the missionaries their own story.
- “**turn**” (*epistrephō*) ~ to turn around or bring back, to make a change, to reverse one’s course of behavior. They turned “**to** or **toward**” God, which involved a corresponding turning “**from** or **away from**” idols.
- Turning from idols was revolutionary. Their culture was permeated by paganism. Everyday life was driven by the fear of the supernatural.
- “**serve a living and true God**” ~ stark contrast to serving the *dead* and *false* pagan idols that previously governed their lives.

To wait for the Rescuer from the coming wrath (1:10)

- They were “**continually waiting**” ^{Greek present tense} for the appearance of God’s Son from heaven. They expected His imminent return.
- **God’s Son** ~ “**whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus.**” Christ’s resurrection and ascension were part of the gospel message and are the reason that believers anticipate His return from heaven.
- “**rescue**” (*rhuomai*) ~ to draw away to oneself, to drag out of harm’s way, or to pull out of danger. The Greek preposition *ek* ~ “**out from**” or “**away from**” ~ being separated completely from something.
- “**wrath**” (*orgē*) ~ righteous judgment that God will bring on an unbelieving and Christ-rejecting world during the “Day of the Lord” (5:2). Church-age saints will be rescued before that day begins (5:9).