

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul Thanks God for Spirit-Empowered Ministry

Introduction

Always full of anticipation as we begin a new study together.

Window into the early days of a church. What are the struggles... some of which we will identify with and some we won't. And this church was exemplary in so many ways.

My desire and prayer and focus is that this church would become clear in our view of the church. That our view would match Christ's.

And that as we learn these truths they would produce convictions.

And that those convictions would be manifest in a change in conduct.

We're a young church. Different backgrounds. Different church histories. Varied ecclesiology.

But the only thing that matters is what Jesus wants for his church. He bought the church. The church is his bride. And so we don't have the right to define these things on our own. It doesn't really matter what you've seen or experienced.

All of that must be submitted to the authority of Scripture.

Pragmatism is so lodged in how we think. Pragmatism determines what's true by what works. The church has been weakened over the decades by this type of thinking.

Frankly, it doesn't really matter what you've seen or what your gut instincts tell you or what you think God has laid on your heart or what you think he's doing. None of it has any authority.

As a church if we are going to be pleasing to Jesus and be a powerful and effective church that sees the Gospel bring transformation to individuals in our region here, this will happen to the degree that we understand and submit to the plan Jesus has for his church.

One of the primary responsibilities as a pastor is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. That word for equipping in Ephesians 4:12 means to fully furnish, compete adequacy, a preparation or training that fully qualifies.

That's done first and foremost through the preaching of the Word. Shapes and transforms. Word of God multiplied.

Also the personal ministry of the Word. Counseling, discipleship, and teaching.

Strategic book. Strategic opportunity. To be equipped in these things.

Finally, to produce unity. Unity today is oftentimes misunderstood. Unity isn't something that we produce or create. It isn't a human effort toward peace. And unity, at least biblical unity, is spirit produced.

because it is spirit produced, it is around the truth. This is backwards from our unity is often sought out. Often times we decide to build a coalition, or create an organization or sign a document where we link arms around some lowest common denominator that we can all agree to. It is a false unity. True unity is established around the truth.

So then, and a unified church is a church that is well-taught and well-equipped. It's the one mindedness of Philippians 2. Think about it analogically, it's very simple. Jesus Christ has one mind. And if we all share that mind, we all have one in mind.

That means conformity. We are conforming to Jesus, conforming to his priorities and his perspective. You value what he values and you de-value what he de-values. Look, a church that has the mind of Christ is a unified church. It's a powerful and influential testimony in the community.

If you are a Christian than conformity is the norm for you.

As we study Thessalonians then, expect to be equipped and to grow in our unity as we submit ourselves to the truth.

As we turn our attention to our passage, we find a church being encouraged.

All of us need to encouragement. Encouragement just means spiritual strengthening. Spiritual fortification to take heart. Even the word itself is to promote or instill courage. We lose heart. We get discouraged—feel like giving up or giving in due to various challenges.

And what we find in this opening chapter, is the apostle Paul encourages the believers at Thessalonica.

Paul Encourages These Believers...

Exegetical Outline

Paul opens his letter by encouraging the Thessalonians by recounting God's work among them.

Paul is relentlessly focused on a vertical perspective regarding the church. He addresses real problems in time and space. He cares about relationships and ministry and service. But it's always connecting back to the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the church.

This past year someone recommended a book on ministry to me. I skimmed it rather than read it. The premise was that we've been doing church all wrong for many years. Each chapter was grounded in either half of a verse or a quote from a cultural influencer or business leader. I thought this is such a waste because there are such riches here for us to think about these things rightly.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians as he...

1. Shares his greetings to the church (1)

- a. The founders
 - b. The flock
2. Shares his thanksgiving for the church (2-10)

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- 3. Paul gives **greetings** to the church (1)
- 4. Paul gives **thanksgiving** to God (2-10)
 - a. The **characteristics** of this gratitude (2)
 - i. The **recipient** of his gratitude is **God** (not people)
 - ii. The **frequency** of his gratitude is **always** (not sporadically)
 - iii. The **object** of his gratitude is the **everyone** (not individuals)
 - b. The **means** of this gratitude (3-10) *how... instrumentality*
 - i. He **reflects** often on God's supernatural work through this church (3) *calls it to mind... thought-life, not about how less noble the Thessalonians were than the Bereans.*
 - ii. He **recognizes** that this fruit is rooted in God's sovereign election (4) *this is the reason... "since we know"*
 - iii. He **roots** his confidence in their response to hearing God's Word (5) *reason I'm telling you I see the fruit... getting specific.*
 - 1. The Gospel brought words but not talk only (5a)
 - 2. The Gospel brought transforming power from God (5b)
 - a. The church **watched the power** that strengthened the missionaries (5c)
 - b. The church **followed the pattern** of Jesus and the missionaries (6a)
 - i. Example #1—**Suffering** for obedience even becoming an international example among believers (6b-7)
 - ii. Example #2—**Sending** (some of them went) legitimate missionaries to take the Gospel throughout the world (8)
 - iii. Example #3—**Sharing** the story of what God had done among them (9-10)
 - 1. Receiving missionaries at a cost (9a)
 - 2. Repenting of idolatry and turning to God (9b)
 - 3. Anticipating with great excitement the return of Jesus (10)

¹ Thessalonians 1:1-10 (NASB)—¹ Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ² We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; ⁵ for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full

conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (ESV)—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. ² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Background

- Paul is writing from Corinth
- Timothy has just arrived back in Corinth with news that the church is standing firm.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:6, 8
- Best harbor on the Aegean Sea
- "It was the key to the whole of Macedonia"¹

Verse 1

- What does the familiar wish *grace* and *peace* mean? Why include it? May every special blessings be yours. Grace is not salvation but sustaining grace that empowers our sanctification. Peace is the result of that. peace with God is not in her feeling of tranquility. Action result for peace with God. Peace with God means that the relationship that was once characterized with and midi is now resolved. eetings at start and end. 1 Thessalonians 5:26
- Not necessarily written as a group effort, but rather Paul writing with the team members alongside him. As an apostle, Paul clearly has a leading role, but Timothy knew these dear saints well.

¹ Ben Witherington III, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, quoting Lightfoot.

- What were the roles of each of these men? *The founders of the church... Acts 17:4.*
- Timothy. Well-spoken of by believers. He's a gifted man who is committed to the church. He's Paul's spiritual son and when Paul's on house arrest in Rome he will say that Timothy is the only one he has who is solely concerned with the affairs of Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-22; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2.
- Trustworthy to handle sensitive church business... Acts 19:22; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 6.
- Silvanus (Silas) who had a leading role in the church in Jerusalem and exercised a prophetic ministry—Acts 15:22, 32. Took over as Paul's coworker after Paul and Barnabas split in Acts 15. They are together on the second missionary journey.
- None of us are called as an apostle as Paul, or an apostolic emissary as Timothy, or a missionary as Silas. But
- Note: no mention of his apostolic status. Why? Significance? He does so in his letter to the church at Rome, birth letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians, Ephesians and Colossians as well as all three of the pastoral epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. **Absent in only letters to the Philippians and Thessalonians.** Both churches he had a great relationship with.
- **Ekklesia** that ever-familiar word for church means the assembly. It doesn't mean building. It doesn't mean a number of believers who profess faith in Christ in a designated area. It refers to the gathering. The assembling. People who get together for no earthly reason—distinct in hobbies and interests, but called together by Jesus. If you're into horses or goats or coffee or poetry or shopping, you connect with people who do the same. Or people who have the same job. Or a similar family background. Or you understand one another because you are in the same stage of life. You are just having kids. Or they've just moved out. Or you don't have kids. Gun clubs. Car clubs. 4H. All shared interests. So what unites us in the church? It's Jesus. It's his love. His love draws us together. We love testimonies. We love to serve one another and meet spiritual needs. We love to learn. We love to grow. We love to help and encourage. We love to share truth with other believers and share the gospel with those outside of Christ.
- This church was brand-new. Unlike many of us there was no history. Not one of these people had Christian parents. Sure some people's parents were believers under the Old Covenant.
- But even that was before indwelling history of the Holy Spirit. It was before spiritual gifts so composed of the body. It was before the priesthood of all believers.
- This is just a normal, typical church. What makes it remarkable isn't that it's unique or extra-spiritual, but that it is connected to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is the church $\epsilon\nu$ and not $\tau\omega$ or $\tau\omicron\upsilon$? Paul has options here for which preposition to use in describing the churches relationship to God—all being true. The church **of** God (denotes his ownership of the church); the church **by** God (his creative power in forming the church); the church **to** God (church exists to magnify his glorify); but he says the church **in** God.

The social dimension (church)... and the vertical (in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ) are thus inseparably joined.

- If you are part of a church then that is a defining characteristic of your life. Not that you are part of Cornerstone Bible Church, but that you are part of the church in God and in Jesus Christ. The head and the body are connected. At least things generally work better when they are. Jesus says I want you to now see yourself no longer as simply a blacksmith or a merchant or a sailor or

- a carpenter or a homemaker. You belong to the assembly of those called by God, united to him the way a body is connected to its head.
- This is a pastoral letter... not a thank you letter or a dear a John letter it's not a rhetorical letter or a legal paper. It originates from a caring shepherd, who although unable to be personally present, still desires to care for the flock of a God from a distance.
 - Is it a citywide church in houses? Bigger organization than that? Going to the whole church. All the members. 1 Thessalonians 5:27.
 - House churches and citywide churches.
 - Cf., 1 Corinthians 1:2; 14:23; 16:19 and Romans 16:5, 23.
 - Letter from dear friends... ministry relationships.
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; 3:6, 10, 11
 - Explore the relationships in body life... difficult, but precious. One another's...

Verse 2

- ευχαρίστομεν—Jesus gave thanks. Paul gives thanks.
- ποιουμενοι is a participle of means. The keys to identification: 1) contemporaneous with the main verb; 2) follows the main verb; 3) main verb is "general"; 4) it explains or defines the main verb rather than simply adding extra color to the action (that would equal manner).²

By means of this opening thanksgiving, Paul and his associates show that they are conscious of the fact that the benefits the Thessalonians received and the conversion they experienced were due to God's action. God, and not the Christian heralds nor the good efforts of the Thessalonians themselves, was the source of their salvation. Their faith, love, and hope were evidence of this salvation (1.3), which was rooted in God's election (1.4) By means of this opening thanksgiving, Paul and his associates show that they are conscious of the fact that the benefits the Thessalonians received and the conversion they experienced were due to God's action. God, and not the Christian heralds nor the good efforts of the Thessalonians themselves, was the source of their salvation. Their faith, love, and hope were evidence of this salvation (1.3), which was rooted in God's election (1.4)³

² GGBB, 226.

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- Paul gives **thanksgiving** to God (2-10)
 - The **characteristics** of this gratitude (2)
 - The **recipient** of his gratitude is **God** (not people)

Why does Paul thank God and not people? The Thessalonians aren't the ones deserving ultimate credit for God's supernatural work among them.

Now don't freak out. Thank you cards are still fine.

Paul occasionally directly thanks individuals. But here it's gratitude to God. It's a tangible reminder of who gets the credit and the honor for spiritual fruit. I love that about this pattern. The warmth and affection we have for one another, even the sense of gratitude is totally appropriate. In fact, Paul's gonna labor the matter of affection shortly.

What would it do for your soul to read this rather than a simple thank you?

So many things:

- **Keeps you from boasting in your spiritual maturity.** If God's the source, then whatever wisdom you have, whatever doctrine you understand, whatever sin you are no longer mastered by is *his* doing. You're the source of none of it. And so, this is the recognition of our absolute and utter dependence upon God for all things. It is a recognition that we deserve nothing, are entitled to nothing, able to do nothing apart from his grace. It recognizes God is the source of all things. Humble people are thankful. Proud people are not. They take it for granted by assuming they deserve whatever they have. They've earned it. They're entitled to it. You're the source of none of it. He gets the praise. It keeps you from boasting.
- **Keeps you from despairing in your weakness.** If God's the source, then there's reason to hope. He knew your sin, he knew your unbelief, he knew your seasons of backsliding and even willful disobedience. You and I can go into a tailspin pretty quick if we start focusing on ourselves and our failures. Paul's gonna bring corrective instruction to deal with sin in this church. But he starts here. And I'm fact, it's where he ends too. ¹ Thessalonians 5:24.
- **Keeps a church from being vulnerable to natural ways of thinking about ministry.** Look, these guys came to town with nothing but the Scriptures, a way to provide for their material needs, and some ministry experience. What's the implication? You can't do anything to improve upon ministry or to make it more effective... if we had louder music, or better signage, or a certain program that people are interested in. God saves those whom he desires and he does it through the obedient lives of his people. When you live like Jesus calls you to, the church becomes a powerful testimony. It's through Christlike growth, not any human strategies. It's his work. And it's through the simple means he describes. It's what's on our wall—expository preaching, biblical shepherding, vibrant body life and Christlike growth. When Paul thanked God it was a reminder of this.
- **Keeps you dependent in prayer.** When you see that God is the one who changes people and raises up leaders and grants salvation and softens hearts and produces specifically fruit, you ask him for it. Being thankful, as we said, humbles us. Humble people pray because they understand that apart from God moving nothing happens.

- How is your attitude of prayer and thankfulness to God?
- Do you give thanks to God for the ministry of others around you?
- Do you thank God for the maturity and obedience he is working in your life or do you dwell on your failures?
- Do you fret about the sanctification of those whom you love, or do you take it to the Lord in prayer?
 - The *frequency* of his gratitude is *always* (not sporadically)

What does this indicate about Paul's prayer life?

- Paul of course loved to pray. But sometimes it almost sounds like he was a monk, holed up in a monastery praying endlessly. Paul says *always*, all is you and constantly.
- If you've ever traveled up to Mt. Angel to the Abbey you'll find there monks who pray... sadly their prayers are corrupt and God doesn't hear any of them. But Paul here is saying *we give thanks*. These church leaders gather for prayer. It's a pattern in the NT. And so they had some degree of routine it would see, because Paul says we give thanks for you guys whenever we pray.
 - The *object* of his gratitude is the *everyone* (not individuals)

What kind of shepherding care is this?

Conclusion

God's Word is such a rich minefield for us. In just the first part of this introduction we glean

Verse 3

- Work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope... each abstract noun is articular. Abstract nouns focus on qualities... "Attitudes of belief, expectation, and judgment." Not person or place, but a subcategory of "things"... ⁴ Although the article is untranslated, it *is* significant... it's a particular work, labor, endurance, that Paul has in mind.
- These three specific attributes made it obvious that God had done a supernatural work. This is a genitive of product or producer. A genitive of production⁵ is when the genitive substantive produces the noun it modifies. Steadfastness of hope... produced by our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ Wallace, *GGBB*, 226 on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order entities.

⁵ Wallace, *GGBB*, 106.

- Agree with the ESV and connect *before our God and Father* to *μνημονευοντες* **not** κυρίου Ιησού Χριστού

Verse 4

- ειδοτες—Paul switches here to the aorist (antecedent). They switch to the aorist participle after the present participle indicates grounds, basis for, cause... “since we know.”
- Where else is it the elect of God... the chosen of God.
- Romans 11:7
- His selection. It is called his **gracious** choice.

Verse 5

- D
- D
- D

Verse 6

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Verse 7

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Verse 8

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Verse 9

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Verse 10

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- D
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