

Session 1

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 1:1-5

Scriptures

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I Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy came to the Thessalonians with one voice, declaring unto them the Word of the Lord. *A threefold cord is not quickly broken* (Eccl. 4:12), and as such, three believing servants of God were a unified choir confirming the truth that would be revealed.

To establish something as the truth, two or three witnesses are required.

II Corinthians 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

Multiple witnesses were essential when elders were accused, when men ignored reproof from a brother, or when sinners in the Old Testament set aside the law of Moses.

This is also true when a new revelation from the Lord is brought to men. Though men may be hesitant to believe one witness, two to three provide greater confirmation that revelation is valid and can be trusted as having its source in God.

Understanding this, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy's joint letter to the Thessalonians gave ample evidence that the word brought to them was from the Lord.

What Paul had preached to the Corinthians of being of one mind, speaking the same thing with no division, was exactly the same harmony that existed between Silvanus, Timothy, and himself.

Ultimately, unity is necessary for outreach. If it is not held by those who hold forth the Word, it will not be easily embraced by those who hear it.

Unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit prompted Paul to pen a letter to the Thessalonians because of whom they were *in*. Their faith resided *in* God as their Father and *in* His Son, Jesus Christ, as their Lord.

They were not like so many Jews who were merely *in* religion, or so many Gentiles who loved their state of being *in* the world.

Rather, for the church of Thessalonica, their true place of refuge, comfort, and delight was *in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*.

This teaches us that though true Christians live in this world, they are not of it, for none can truly walk with the Father and be content with a carnal and sinful world so distinct and different than Him.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I Thess. 1:1

In God.—Other Thessalonians were “in the world,” “in darkness,” “in their sins.” The distinctive mark of these was that they were re-united to the Father of all men; and more, re-united in Christ.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 1:1

Which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ - Who are united to the true God and to the Redeemer; or who sustain an intimate relation to the Father and the Lord Jesus. This is strong language, denoting, that they were a true church...

Both the Father and Jesus Christ are mentioned because men cannot truly possess one without also possessing the other, as God is seen and made visible through the Son, and no man can see the Father except through the one sent to declare Him (John 1:18).

Thus, it is impossible by biblical standards to hold one member of the Trinity and not hold the others. For a man to be truly saved, all members of the Godhead must be embraced.

The Great Commission demands that men are baptized or should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because they are divinely bound, and to truly believe in one will lead to belief in the other two (Matt. 28:19).

Matthew Poole's Commentary, I Thess. 1:1

And in the Lord Jesus Christ; these two are put together, because there is no access to God the Father, no true worship of him, no union or communion with him, and so no being in him, but through Jesus Christ. And by both they might see the blessed state they were now brought to by the gospel; being before strangers to God the Father and Jesus Christ, but now in them.

The degree in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are divinely linked is seen throughout Scripture. Hence, if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not a man's Lord, then God will not be his Father. Even as it is through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that heavenly sonship is both gained and confirmed.

Galatians 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Likewise, men will properly and rightfully call God *Abba, Father*, only when Christ sends the Spirit into their hearts.

This teaches us that for true salvation and for a man to rightfully call God his Father, the Holy Spirit must be received, and Christ's lordship rightfully accepted.

I Corinthians 12:3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

For any to say that Jesus is his Lord, he must possess the Spirit of God, as it will take His Spirit to ultimately compel a man to confess Jesus as Lord.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 12:3

And that no man can say ... - That is, that it cannot occur, or even happen, that anyone will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah who is not influenced by the Holy Spirit. The meaning is, not that no one has physical ability to say that Jesus is Lord unless aided by the Holy Spirit, since all people can say this; but that no one will be disposed heartily to say it; no one will acknowledge him as their Lord; it can never happen that anyone will confess him as the true Messiah who has not been brought to this state by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the Thessalonians held a sincere love for both the Father and the Son, they were reciprocally loved and adored back.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Ultimately, true salvation will always include confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ, being filled with God's Holy Spirit, and being made a son of God through Christ.

For God to rightfully be any man's true Father, there must be an acceptance of His Son and a receiving of the Holy Spirit sent by Him. By these realities alone are men confirmed to be in the family of God.

Grace be unto you, and peace.

This is the message that Paul and his companions hoped to impart to the Thessalonians, one of grace and peace from their heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is divine favor bestowed upon men.

Because Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, he was saved by God (Heb. 11:7).

Romans also reveals that it is by *grace* that men are saved through faith (Rom. 3:23–24).

Hence, even the process that God employs to save the sinner, faith, is an act of divine grace.

Peace.

Peace is that which joins things together into a whole. “#1515 *eirénē* (from *eirō*, ‘to join, tie together into a whole’)—properly, wholeness, i.e. when all essential parts are joined together; peace (God's gift of wholeness).”

Man in his sinful condition is broken. His relationship with God and other men has been severed. Thus for healing to begin, there must first be reconciliation, and this reconciliation begins and ends with Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

It is only through faith in God's son that peace with God can be entered into and harmony with other men can truly begin.

Without reconciliation through the death of Christ, true peace with God and fellowship with others would be unattainable.

The Thessalonians had come into God's favor because of their faith in the Son of God. Therefore peace with God as well with each other became their spiritual fruit.

I Thessalonians 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

Paul knew that the Thessalonians' conversion and growth were due solely to God, and for this he was thankful.

This teaches us that only those who truly give thanks to the Lord know Him as the source of all blessings and goodness.

I Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

Whenever there is a resurgence of faith and increased love in the people of God, it is because of God. Ultimately, it is the Lord who gives and prompts any increase in His church, and this is always the case when divine attributes like faith and love are present. Hence, whenever God's people bear spiritual fruit, you can know that a divine source is mightily involved in their lives. It is God who makes all things to grow, to increase, and to prosper, and without Him, nothing can.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 3:6

The power is not in the naked word, nor in him that plants, nor in him that waters, nor in the heart where it is sown, but in God. ... The seed must be sown or it will not germinate. Truth must be sown in the heart, and the heart must be prepared for it - as the earth must be plowed and made mellow, or it will not spring up. It must be cultivated with assiduous care, or it will produce nothing. But still it is all of God - as much so as the yellow harvest of the field, after all the toils of the farmer is of God. And as the farmer who has just views, will take no praise to himself because his grain and his vine start up and grow after all his care, but will ascribe all to God's unceasing, beneficent agency; so will the minister of religion, and so will every Christian, after all their care, ascribe all to God.

I Thessalonians 1:3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

The fact that the Thessalonians received the gospel revealed their willingness to allow God's power and authority over their lives. Since no man can joyfully receive the gospel and at the same time reject its divine authority over himself.

The Thessalonians' work, labor, and love proved the sincerity of their faith. Once a man also truly believes, his life of service to God will prove it.

Work of faith.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 1:3

Works of faith are those to which faith prompts, and which show that there is faith in the heart.

Man does many things that are prompted not by faith but by some other, selfish human motive.

The opposite of this is a *work of faith*, which has as its core trust in and reliance on God. True faith also is only possessed through first hearing the Word of God.

Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Just as faith necessitates that God must first speak, a work of faith requires the same Word of God to be revealed.

Ultimately, there is no such thing as a true work of the Lord that God, Himself, does not first inspire.

Understanding this, we can know that the Thessalonians performed works for God that were inspired by Him. They were not merely religious men who lived their lives and carried out their religion according only to their own human will.

Christians were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, and those who possess sincere faith in the Father and in His Son will seek to live their lives fulfilling them.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

One of the designs of the new birth is that God's new sons may be led by Him to do good works for His kingdom.

Because good works are both inspired and purposed by God, the good that is done will bring glory to God's name. Scripture also warns believers to continue doing good works, as this is God's will for their lives (Tit. 3:8).

The reason for this is that when benevolence ceases, true faith in God is very likely lost, none also can walk in fellowship with the Lord and not be compelled to live a life bringing glory to Him through good works done in His own holy name.

Labour of love.

Not only was faith a catalyst for the Thessalonians' service, but agape love played a dominant role in leading them to exert labor for the Lord.

When men truly love God, they are more than willing to labor for Him.

Caring for Christ's church is what Jesus instructed Peter in when He repeatedly asked him if he had true love for Christ (John 21:15–17).

When men therefore take on the care and well-being of the people of God, it proves that they have true love for Him in their hearts. Consider as well that, if a man does not truly love the children of God, whom he can see, we know he does not love God, whom he cannot (I John 4:20).

Ultimately, no man can properly be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and have God as his Father while lacking the supernatural element of divine love in his heart.

Hence, if love is absent, no true knowledge of God can be held. This teaches us that though men may claim they know the Lord, without love they really do not.

As love reveals that God dwells in men's hearts, its absence reveals that He is not.

1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, 1 John 4:8

He that loveth not, knoweth not God - Has no true acquaintance with God; has no just views of him, and no right feelings toward him. The reason for this is implied in what is immediately stated, that "God is love," and of course if they have no love reigning in their hearts, they cannot pretend to be like him.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, 1 John 4:8

Yea, since love is his very nature, and that God is love, those that love (upon the account and in the way above expressed) are born of him, partake from him that excellent and most delectable nature, know him by a transformative knowledge: but they that love not, they are mere strangers to him, and never had to do with him.

It is by walking in love that God's law is fulfilled.

Romans 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Since God is love, when men pursue His nature they reveal themselves as true followers of Him.

Yet if men do not possess love, though they might think they have an abundance of other things, God's Word reveals that they are in the end esteemed by the Lord as absolutely nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, 1 Cor. 13:2

I am nothing - All would be of no value. It would not save me. I should still be an unredeemed, unpardoned sinner. I should do good to no one; I should answer none of the great purposes which God has designed; I should not by all this secure my salvation. All would be in vain in regard to the great purpose of my existence. None of these things could be placed before God as a ground of acceptance in the Day of Judgment. Unless I should have love, I should still be lost.

True Christians cannot and will not lack sincere love for God and His people.

1 Thessalonians 4:9 But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, 1 Thess. 4:9

It is one of the first - the elementary effects of religion on the soul, to lead us to love "the brethren" - and to do this is one of the evidences of piety about which there need be no danger of deception; compare 1 John 3:14.

Patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the center of all true hope is the person of Jesus Christ.

This is also why without faith in the Lord Jesus, any true hope of heaven can be nothing but mere wishful imagination.

It is Christ Who gives eternal life, and His power alone which enables men to keep it.

John 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

When the Son of God has granted a man eternal life, then we know that he will never perish, nor can any other power remove him from Christ's possession.

I Thessalonians 1:4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

All Christians owe their standing in the gospel to their election of God.

The word for *election*, “#1589 *eklogḗ*,” is defined as a “divine selection,” whereby through the will of God men and women are brought to share in His promises.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *eklogḗ* as the act of picking out, choosing: σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς (the genitive of quality; cf. Winers Grammar, § 34, 3 b.; [Buttmann, 161 (140f)]), equivalent to ἐκλεκτόν, namely, τοῦ Θεοῦ, Acts 9:15; specifically used of that act of God's free will by which before the foundation of the world he decreed his blessings to certain persons; — ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν προφῆσις, the decree made from choice (A. V. the purpose according to election).

Since none can respond to the gospel unless God has chosen them to be His own, saved men must be first chosen, men.

John 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

Consider as well that the Lord sees men and knows of their existence long before they are called to Himself. This was true of Nathanael and will also be true of us. When Nathanael asked Jesus, *Whence knowest thou me?* Jesus responded that He first seen him when Nathanael was under the tree.

This teaches us that when men are called by Christ, He has already seen and selected them to be His own.

Ultimately, predestination is the foundation of every call of Christ. Since, Jesus calls none to Himself that he does not already know God has purposed to be in his church.

John 1:48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, John 1:48

When thou wast under the fig-tree - It is evident that it was from something that had occurred under the fig-tree that Jesus judged of his character. What that was is not recorded. It is not improbable that Nathanael was accustomed to retire to the shade of a certain tree, perhaps in his garden or in a grove, for the purpose of meditation and prayer. The Jews were much in the habit of selecting such places for private devotion, and in such scenes of stillness and retirement there is something especially favorable for meditation and prayer. Our Saviour also worshipped in such places. Compare John 18:2; Luke 6:12. In that place of retirement it is not improbable that Nathanael was engaged in private devotion.

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I saw thee - It is clear, from the narrative, that Jesus did not mean to say that he was bodily present with Nathanael and saw him; but he knew his thoughts, his desires, his secret feelings and wishes. In this sense Nathanael understood him. We may learn:

1. that Jesus sees what is done in secret, and is therefore divine.
2. that he sees us when we little think of it.
3. that he sees us especially in our private devotions, hears our prayers, and marks our meditations. And,
4. that he judges of our character chiefly by our private devotions. Those are secret; the world sees them not; and in our closets we show what we are. How does it become us, therefore, that our secret prayers and meditations should be without “guile” and hypocrisy, and such as Jesus will approve!

It is worthy of note that a man’s faith in God is not the basis for God choosing him but rather the result of it.

John 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

What is true of Christians is equally true of apostles and all other ministries in the church. Thus for any to bare fruit in Christian ministry they need to be first chosen and ordained by Christ for it.

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, John 15:16

Ye have not chosen me - The word here translated “chosen” is that from which is derived the word “elect,” and means the same thing. It is frequently thus translated, Mark 13:20; Matthew 24:22, Matthew 24:24, Matthew 24:31; Colossians 3:12. It refers here, doubtless, to his choosing or electing them to be apostles. He says that it was not because they had chosen him to be their teacher and guide, but because he had designated them to be his apostles. See John 6:70; also Matthew 4:18–22.

God has set the members in Christ’s body as it has pleased Him, so no man can rightfully take any ministerial honor to himself through only personal will and/or desire.

I Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Distinguishing himself from those who possessed only words as evidence of their faith, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that His gospel came with power and that it possessed the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts men of sin and through His power makes God known to them.

So that if a man comes in God’s name but possesses not the power of the Spirit in his life then we can know that he was never sent by God.

Matthew 10:20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

Whenever also men are truly led by the Spirit of God, it will be quite visible that the word spoken by them has God as its source.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 1:5

For our gospel came not unto you - When first preached; Acts 17:1-3. Paul speaks of it as "our gospel," because it was the gospel preached by him and Silas and Timothy; comp 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:8. He did not mean to say that the gospel had been originated by him, but only that he had delivered the good news of salvation to them. He is here stating the evidence which had been given that they were a church "chosen by God." He refers, first, to the manner in which the gospel was received by them 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7, and, secondly, to the spirit which they themselves manifested in sending it abroad; yet 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

In word only - Was not merely spoken; or was not merely heard. It produced a powerful effect on the heart and life. It was not a mere empty sound that produced no other effect than to entertain or amuse; compare Ezekiel 33:32.

But also in power - That is, in such power as to convert the soul. The apostle evidently refers not to any miracles that were performed there, but to the effect of the gospel on those who heard it. It is possible that there were miracles performed there, as there were in other places, but there is no mention of such a fact, and it is not necessary to suppose it, in order to see the full meaning of this language. There was great power manifested in the gospel in its leading them to break off from their sins, to abandon their idols, and to give their hearts to God...

If a man does not have spiritual power in his ministry, God has not inspired it. If we learn anything from the study of Thessalonians, let it be this: the true gospel of Jesus Christ will always carry spiritual power with it.

Matthew 7:29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Matt. 7:29

As one having authority, and not as the scribes - The scribes were the learned people and teachers of the Jewish nation, and were principally Pharisees. They taught chiefly the sentiments of their Rabbis, and the traditions which had been delivered; they consumed much of their time in useless disputes and "vain jangling." Jesus was open, plain, grave, useful, delivering truth as "became" the oracles of God; not spending his time in trifling disputes and debating questions of no importance, but confirming his doctrine by miracles and argument; teaching "as having power," as it is in the original, and not in the vain and foolish manner of the Jewish doctors. He showed that he had authority to explain, to enforce, and to "change" the ceremonial laws of the Jews. He came with authority such as no "man" could have, and it is not remarkable that his explanations astonished them.

Those who carry spiritual authority in their ministries are like Paul, to whom Christ has revealed His Word.

Galatians 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul's source for the gospel he preached was Christ and not himself.

It was not from man, nor by man, that the apostle brought forth the gospel, but only by and through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Unlike other religious movements of the day, the early apostles spoke the Word of the Lord boldly because they knew and believed the power that God had given Christ.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Benson Commentary, Matt. 28:18

Dr. Whitby [states], "He to whom any office is duly committed, must have sufficient power and wisdom to discharge that office. Now to govern all things in heaven and earth belongs only to him who is the Lord and Maker of them, and therefore is known by this title, both in Scripture and by the heathen. To have power over death, and to be able to raise the dead, is to have that power which is proper to God alone: and to have power over the souls of men, and the knowledge of all hearts, belongs to God alone." Our Lord, therefore, is invested with, and exercises this authority and power, although as the Son of man, yet not as a mere man, for as such it would have been impossible for him to exercise it, but as a man in whom *dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily*.

It is the Son whom God has given full authority to judge the world.

John 5:22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, John 5:22

The reason why judgment is committed to the Son is given in John 5:27 as resulting from His humanity. It is stated here as resulting from His divinity.

As the Son of Man, Jesus has right over man, and as the Son of God, Jesus has right to that which is God's.

By these two qualities, being both the Son of Man and the Son of God, Jesus Christ will reign over the world.

Hence, the Word of the Lord will always carry authority with it because it is the Word of Him who will one day rule all things, both in this world and in the heavenly regions beyond it.