

1 Thessalonians 1:2-5

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The Thessalonians are always in Paul's thoughts and prayers. He affirms to them that they are loved by God, and that he has heard report of their boldness in faith and love. Paul reflects on the brief time he spent sharing the gospel with them.

Paul, Silas (*Silvanus*), and *Timothy* greet the Thessalonians with encouragement. They give thanks to God always for all of them, making mention of them in their prayers. Throughout this epistle, it is made clear that Paul and the others felt a deep closeness to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:8). The Thessalonians are ever-present in Paul's thoughts. He is *constantly bearing in mind* their work of faith and labor of love.

The Thessalonians' *work of faith* has spread to regions around them, for which Paul congratulates them further on in the letter (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The testimony of how the Thessalonians turned from idolatry to Jesus is known to believers elsewhere in Macedonia and Achaia, possibly referencing the newly formed churches in Philippi and Berea. Paul also is *constantly bearing in mind* their labor of love. He applauds the Thessalonians for how well they love one another, writing that they have "no need for anyone to write to you," about loving one another, because they "are taught by God to love one another" and have displayed love for "all the brethren who are in all Macedonia" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). They treated their fellow believers with such authentic and natural love, that they did not need to be prompted to love one another. They were already doing it. God worked actively through them in this regard. It is by loving one another that Jesus said the world will see that people are His disciples (John 13:35). The Thessalonians were fulfilling this aspect of living out their faith excellently.

Paul also lists that the Thessalonians' *steadfastness of hope* is *constantly* on his *mind*—their *hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father*. This is a point of concern among the Thessalonians which Paul will address; they are so hopeful for the return of Jesus that they fear if they die, they will miss out on His second coming. So Paul commends them for how *steadfast* is their *hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Part of the reason the Thessalonians have great hope in their *Lord Jesus Christ* is because He is *in the presence of our God and Father*. Paul expands on this in his letter to the Philippians, making it clear that Jesus came to earth as a human, leaving the *presence* of the Father, out of obedience to the Father. And because Jesus learned obedience, even to death on a cross, His name is lifted above every name. So now Jesus is back in the *presence of our God and Father*, having received the great reward of ruling over the earth as a human servant-king; God made flesh and raised up above all things (Philippians 2:5-11).

(Paul left Philippi shortly before coming to Thessalonica, but did not write his letter to the Philippians until much later, when he was under house arrest in Rome.) The Thessalonians clearly understood that Jesus had ascended into heaven, was *in the presence of our God and Father*, and would return a second time to gather His people. What they did not understand was

what happened to believers who died prior to Jesus' return. Paul will answer their concern later on in this letter by encouraging them and correcting their misunderstanding.

Paul has assurance that God pursued the Thessalonians in a special manner: *knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you*. It is evident that the Thessalonians, through their response to the Gospel, were pursued by God. In fact, God intervened and called Paul to Macedonia (northern Greece, where Thessalonica was) in order to preach the gospel there (Acts 16:6-12). Paul calls the Thessalonians *brethren beloved by God*, clearly showing that they are believers in Jesus, they are *brethren* of Paul because they are spiritually born into God's family, and are children of God. The Thessalonians chose to believe the gospel message, as is made clear in this letter and the Acts account. But Paul also notes *His choice of you*. God chose and loved them. They responded to the gospel. We can see here the mystery of God at work, where God's sovereignty and the free will He gave to humans are both in operation. This is one of many things about God that is beyond the scope of understanding of human reason, as Paul states in Romans:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?” (Romans 11:33-35).

Paul notes that *the gospel did not come to you in word only*; it was not merely preached to them, *but also in power and in the Holy Spirit*. We are not told of any signs or wonders which occurred during Paul's stay in Thessalonica. The account in Acts 17 only tells of Paul preaching, and of the Jews and Greeks who believed in Christ, and of the subsequent mob that raged in the city until Paul and company fled under dark of night. However, this reference that the gospel came in *power and in the Holy Spirit* means that some kind of miraculous event must have taken place. God often uses works and displays of supernatural power to validate those He has sent to persuade others (Hebrews 2:3-4). It was in *power* and some sort of work of the *Holy Spirit* that Paul, Timothy, and Silas taught their gospel.

This was not uncommon in the spreading of the Gospel in the early days of the church. Paul visited Philippi shortly before coming to Thessalonica, where great works of God are recorded (Acts 16:16-34). The *Holy Spirit's* arrival at Pentecost empowered the believers there to speak in foreign tongues they had not priorly known (Acts 2:4). Healings of physical and spiritual ailments were frequent, just as Jesus had performed throughout His ministry (Acts 5:16, Acts 8:7). We are told that the Lord testified through Paul by “granting that signs and wonders be done” by his hands as he preached the gospel of God's grace (Acts 14:3). So apparently Paul performed some kind of divine *power*, perhaps in the form of a sign which showed the Thessalonians that he spoke the message of God, not of man. Paul could also be referring to the Gentiles manifesting a sign of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in other languages, as seemed to be the norm in this era, for Gentile believers.

The gospel also came to the Thessalonians *with full conviction*. The context seems to explain what Paul means by *full conviction*, since he adds: *just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake*. Paul began this thought by saying *for our gospel did not come to*

you in word only. In addition to *power* and *the Holy Spirit*, the gospel came to the Thessalonians through the character of Paul, Silas and Timothy. They did not just talk the talk. They also walked the walk. Paul here is not relying on a third party witness. He appeals directly to their personal experience with them, saying *just as you know*. Paul, Silas and Timothy dwelt among the Thessalonians, and they saw for themselves that Paul and his partners had *full conviction* that what they were saying was true, because they actually lived by those words. This elevates an important principle, that preaching the gospel is quite holistic, and includes the integrity of matching words and lifestyle. In the case of Paul and Silas, this likely included their courageous resolution in the face of persecution.

Paul points to the way he and Timothy and Silas *proved to be genuine men*. They were not hucksters rolling into town selling a lie, but were honest men who believed in the truth of the Gospel they preached, that they preached for the Thessalonians' *sake*, even to the point of being chased out of town. That their actions matched their words demonstrated the *full conviction* with which they spoke the good news of Jesus Christ, so much so that the Thessalonians could tell by their actions that these *men* truly believed that Jesus would return and judge the world. Accordingly, they lived in such a manner as to be found faithful at Jesus' appearing. This will be the overriding exhortation Paul will give the Thessalonians. In doing so, he will invite them to follow his example. Paul lived a life of faith not only because he really believed it was true (and therefore in his best interest). He was also aware of the power of example, so he lived *among* the Thessalonians in a manner consistent with his preaching *for* their *sake*.

Biblical Text

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.