

Thankful for the Church

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-4

Over the past few weeks, we have been discussing particular blessings received through our relationship with Christ, and the thankfulness we should possess for those blessings. As I pondered all I have received in Christ, one of the greatest blessings associated with being in Christ is the fellowship that comes with salvation. Those saved by grace are placed within the body of Christ, and become part of the church. I am thankful for the church!

Our text comes from the greeting Paul wrote as he penned a letter to the Thessalonian church. Paul was led of the Spirit from Macedonia to Philippi, and from there into Thessalonica. It is estimated there were around 200,000 people in the city at that time. There was a large Jewish population, as well as many Greeks who had grown weary of Greek paganism that promoted immorality and indulgence. Thessalonica was ripe for the Gospel, and although Paul faced much opposition, he developed a love and devotion for the church there.

As we examine the [details](#) of Paul's greeting to Thessalonica, I want to consider the thought: [Thankful for the Church](#). As we move through this passage, I hope it will enhance our appreciation for, and commitment to the church. Paul spoke of:

I. A Lasting Relationship (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 mentioned various relationships associated with the church. Notice:

A. The Servants – This letter was written by Paul, but he also sent regards from Silas and Timothy as well. The church was familiar with these men. They too had labored alongside Paul, establishing the church. Paul was thankful for their support and fellowship; and he knew the church would be as well.

- There is something special about those with whom we labor. Serving the Lord together, particularly in times of adversity, creates a bond between those who work together. We ought to rejoice for those of like faith and thank the Lord for them. It would be a lonely and difficult task without those whom the Lord has placed alongside us!

B. The Saints – Paul was certainly thankful for Silas and Timothy, but he was also thankful for the beloved, the church. Without them, there would be no ministry, no effort for them to labor together

for. In this greeting, Paul reminds them of the nature of their relationship with him and with God. Notice, he spoke of:

1. Their Position (1a) – Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, **unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.** They were reminded of the position they held. This is simple and yet profound. Paul speaks of a physical location as well as a spiritual location. First, he reminded them of where they were. They were the **church of the Thessalonians**, called to minister in that great city. This was in reference to the opportunities and obligations associated with Thessalonica.

- Next, he reminded them who they were. They were set apart, servants of the living God. They were **in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.** This reminded them of their obligation to serve the Lord, and the great power and potential that they possessed in Him. (We too need to be reminded of our physical and spiritual location. We are positioned where we are with purpose and obligation!)

2. The Petition (1b) – **Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.** Paul offered a prayer of blessing for grace and peace unto them. He desired the Lord's **grace** in their lives. This speaks of *"that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, and charm. It deals with God's unmerited favor; the extension of His holy influence upon their lives."*

- He also desired **peace** for them. This was essential considering the opposition they faced. Paul wanted them to enjoy *"harmony, security, prosperity, and an absolute assurance of their faith."* These elements are essential if we are to lead productive, spiritual lives. We will accomplish little for the Lord if we lack grace and peace. God's grace sustains us while His peace secures us.

II. A Loving Request (2) – **We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.** Paul encouraged them with the fact that he was praying for them. (Isn't it encouraging when a known prayer warrior lets you know he/she is praying for you?) So, let's consider the particulars of Paul's request. Notice:

A. The Premise – He revealed that he gave thanks unto God for them. He was actively praying for the believers at Thessalonica and the work in which they were engaged. They were the focus, the heart of his prayer. He knew they needed the help of God and he sought the Lord on their behalf.

- Wouldn't you agree that we need reminded of this urgent need? Surely you would agree that we all need the Lord's help as we seek to serve Him. We should endeavor to pray more earnestly for the church and each one who makes it up. We need to pray for one another! We ought to thank the Lord for those with whom we serve!

B. The Prayer (2) – *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.*

Paul literally made mention of them when he prayed. This was not just a generic, casual prayer, but a genuine plea for specific needs in the lives of individuals. He knew them personally, knowing the struggles and needs they faced individually.

- I know that we can't be aware of every need, everyone within the church has, but I am convinced that we could do better about praying for specific needs. When someone within the church asks for prayer, they genuinely desire us to make mention of that need when we pray. Let's make that a priority and earnestly pray for their need.

C. The Persistence (2) – There is a little word within the text that has great significance. A quick reading may overlook it, but it reveals much about the request Paul made. He gave thanks and made mention of them *always*. That literally means what it says. It means "*at all times, always.*"

Paul wasn't occasionally thankful for them. He wasn't occasionally mindful of their labor and the needs of the church. Paul always prayed for them. He mentioned them every time he prayed.

- I think if we would be honest, many of us do not always pray, much less make mention of others each time we do. Prayer is the most effective and powerful tool a Christian possesses, and yet I fear it is often the least used. May we develop a sense of urgency and a commitment to pray – and when we pray, make it a priority to mention the needs of others?

III. A Loyal Remembrance (3-4) – As he concluded the greeting, Paul called to remembrance the faithful and enduring attributes of the church at Thessalonica. First, he was reminded of:

A. Their Labor (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;* Paul speaks of their unending *work of faith*. This dealt with their consistent labor for their faith in Christ. They had embraced Jesus as the Christ, and were unshaken in their commitment to Him and those who needed to believe in Christ as their Savior as well. The enemy continued to bring about opposition, but the church refused to abandon the work of the Lord.

- As I studied these verses I wondered if the same could be said of us. If someone who knew Fellowship, took the time to ponder what they remembered of us, what would they have to say? Could it be said that we too were committed to the work of faith? Are the Lord and His work the priority? Are we determined to reach the world by sharing the good news?

B. Their Love (3) – Paul also remembered their [labor of love](#). That is an interesting concept isn't it? Typically, one doesn't view love as being laborious or burdensome, but there are occasions when it certainly is. The church at Thessalonica was not deterred by the opposition of others. They determined to love unconditionally. Their love was not based solely upon what they received. They expressed love even when it wasn't earned, deserved, or returned. That is loving as God loves!

- Also, I believe it could be said that they were so moved by the love they had received of Christ, that they were compelled to labor for Him whatever the cost or circumstance. When one's heart is filled with love, labor is not a burden, but a joy!

C. Their Longsuffering (3) – [and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ](#). The hope Paul spoke of was that blessed hope the believer has in Christ, the hope and assurance of eternal life. They were not inconsistent with that hope. They were patient – “*steadfastness, endurance, loyalty, and perseverance*.” Even in the face of adversity and the continual presence of false doctrine and temptation, they remained steadfast in their faith. They would not be moved from the foundation of their faith!

D. Their Livelihood (3) – Paul offered an encouraging reminder once again that their hope is not in vain. [Their faith, love, and hope were settled in Christ the Lord and God the Father](#). They were held and secured in His mighty hand. Storms would come and opposition would remain, but they were being led by the Master's hand.

E. Their Longevity (4) – [Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God](#). Paul well understood the adversity the church in Thessalonica faced, but he was not concerned about their demise. Paul knew they would remain, even though difficulty abounded on every hand.

- This was not an ordinary group of people. This was a group of beloved brethren, the elect of God. I know election makes a lot of Baptists nervous, but really it shouldn't. The word election means “*the act of picking out, to choose*.” Now we can carry that to extremes if we wish, but it simply means that God chose to save us by His divine grace. God chose to provide a means of

our salvation and then He drew us unto Himself so that we might be saved. The saved will endure even though adversity continues to come against us. Our lives are not dictated by outward circumstances, but by an inward presence!

Conclusion: Are you thankful for the church? Has the commitment of Paul enhanced your devotion to the church? Are you doing all you can to pray for, support, and serve the church? Are you part of the church, being saved by God's good grace? I am thankful for the church, blessed to be a part of the church, and I want to increase my love and devotion for the church! If there are needs, especially regarding salvation, come to Christ today!