



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Greeting and Thanks

Paul's first epistle to the brethren in Thessalonica is perhaps the oldest book included in the New Testament writings. The church in Thessalonica had a turbulent beginning on Paul's second missionary journey, with the Jews there being extremely hostile to Paul and to the introduction of the teachings concerning Christ and His new way. They not only ran the apostle out of Thessalonica, but they were so intensely opposed to his teaching that they also went down to Berea and drove him out of there as well, so that Paul ended up going by sea to Athens. After spending a comparatively short time in Athens, Paul went to Corinth, where he wrote this letter out of his intense concern for the welfare of the Thessalonian brethren.

- ▼ **Greetings from brethren** — Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy had been with Paul in Philippi, and had gone with him to Thessalonica. When Paul exited Thessalonica, he left Silas and Timothy behind. Eventually they came to Paul at Corinth, bringing him financial support from Philippi, as well as added teamwork for the preaching/teaching load. So as Paul writes this epistle, he includes Silas and Timothy in his greeting. "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy," he begins, "to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace" (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
- ▼ **Thankful prayers** — Every time Paul had a moment to think about the brethren in Thessalonica and consider the challenges to their faith and eternity, he prayed. "We give thanks to God always for all of you," says he, "making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Thessalonians 1:2). The apostle Paul, following in the footsteps of His Master, the Lord Jesus, in effect laid down his life for the brethren. That sacrifice was borne out of his love for their souls — a true, deep, abiding love. Hence, it is in all sincerity that his prayers are continual, and full of thankfulness and hope for the brethren.
- ▼ **Your work of faith** — One of the things the apostle mentions is that he is "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). A person can work hard, but that work often has nothing to do with "the faith" of the new covenant. A person can build bridges for Christ if he has the right perspective, or he can build bridges with no consciousness of Christ at all. But when the apostle brings up the concept of "your work of faith," he has in mind more of a direct work in spreading the gospel, strengthening and encouraging the saints, and building up the local congregation. To keep the church in Thessalonica intact in the face of such intense persecution, as well as to increase in number, would require much work of faith.
- ▼ **Your labor of love** — It is clear that spreading the gospel and strengthening the saints takes labor. If there is no concerted effort, nothing happens. But unless that labor for souls is an outgrowth of love for the lost and earnest desire for the security of the saved, then the effort is also wasted and tends to be counterproductive. Paul comments that he always bears in mind the Thessalonian brethren's "labor of love."
- ▼ **Your steadfastness of hope** — It is one thing to maintain faith for a short period of time, or when things are "going well." It is another to stay upbeat, positive, and on course through persecutions and tribulations. Paul praises the brethren for their "steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus in the presence of our God and Father." They never wavered in their belief in their own resurrection to life at Jesus' second coming (which is the *hope*).

What awesome brethren these in Thessalonica were! The honest commendation by Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, showed that these were not mere polite words, spewed out into the atmosphere because it was customary. For them to have the true works of faith, the honest labor of love, and rock-solid steadfastness of hope serves as an enduring example. May modern saints imitate their example, so that the same words of commendation may be said of them likewise.

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