

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

October 23, 2022



SCRIPTURE

1 Paul, Silas^[a] and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters,^[b] and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. **4** Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

COMMENTARY

1:1-2. Within a short time of Paul's first letter, the Thessalonian Christians received yet another letter, co-authored by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Since the three missionaries were still together, most likely only a few months separated the two writings. They wrote to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a good description for any local church—grounded in a particular city or town, belonging to the community, but connected to our Lord. The church is an assembly of people, called out from the city's throng to worship Christ, then sent back into the city to proclaim and live his goodness. We are citizens of two worlds. God is the wellspring of grace. He has a passion to give, and this extravagance issues from His love. Grace is any action or gift freely given; it cannot be earned or retained by personal effort. And when we are speaking of God's grace, it covers everything. But even though God's grace does not depend upon us, it can be hindered by us through sin, ingratitude, and refusal.

1:3. Paul's opening statement, We ought always to thank God for you, sounds a bit like grinding duty. While obligation is felt in these words, it is not guilt-induced. Paul did, in fact, feel a duty to give thanks, but the duty was not to the Thessalonians, but to God. Paul literally had an outstanding debt before God, and it was a debt of thanks. Hearing of the spiritual life and development in the Thessalonians, he knew that God's faithfulness undergirded their progress. Consequently, an ongoing offering of thanks was due God.



The Thessalonians were the occasion of Paul's thanksgiving, but God was the source, for it was God working in partnership with them, which had caused their faith and love to increase. Faith refers to the out workings of Christian belief. It is not just doctrinal dogma, but coherence of belief and action.

1:4. This is a transition verse, combining delight with a hint of what will follow, as Paul turned his attention to the hardships these believers confronted each day. Despite some of the internal problems of the church, such as laziness and misconceptions about Christ's return, Paul recognized some sterling qualities in these believers. He encouraged them by pointing these qualities out: we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. Love (v. 3), faith, and perseverance (made possible through hope), form the eternal triad. Paul not only commended them for these qualities, he also spread the news to other churches. He was thrilled at the genuine nature of their faith. The persecutions and trials they encountered were varied, yet unspecified. These could have been anything which resulted from faith in Christ and from seeking to live righteously in a hostile culture. Their perseverance was not a meek "I can take it" but a steadfast, heroic strength from God. Such continuance under difficulties results from an abiding trust in God's goodness and sovereignty.

1:5. Paul declared, "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right". All what? It hardly seems likely that the persecutions were evidence of God's righteous judgment. Most likely it was the Thessalonian believers' ability and power to persevere and stand in the midst of unjust hardship that was the evidence pointing to God's judgment. The truth of the gospel, the transformation of their lives, and the certainty of the future justice of God were proved by their ability to withstand the various trials. In addition, their lives proved God's indwelling power. The Thessalonians' endurance came from something besides human capacity. By their lives they validated God's work and strength and the transforming energy of his Spirit. Suffering with strength not only proves the power of God; it also proves the saving faith held by these Christians: as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. They did not attain their salvation through suffering; they demonstrated it, thus establishing their worthiness to inherit the joys and benefits of God's favor when Christ establishes His kingdom.

MAIN POINT

Increased faith in God and love for others gives evidence of Christ in you.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

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Who is someone in your life that you thank God for? Why?



Who is someone you are proud of and don't mind bragging about on occasion? Why?

What are some reasons you would like some people in your life to be proud of you and thankful for you?

Second Thessalonians picks up with the same tone we found in 1 Thessalonians (1:2; 2:13; 3:9). Paul, Silas, and Timothy were thankful for the believers in Thessalonica. The gratitude they had for the people who made up this local church went far deeper than some of the surface level appreciation we often feel and express today. These believers were growing in faith and love—and that is always a reason for thankfulness.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-2.

How was the church at Thessalonica described in verse 1?

There are many churches in the world today. What evidence might set a church apart as being “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”?

What evidence might set a church apart as not being “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”?

Why do you think Paul used this phrase in both verses 1 and 2?

What does verse 2 indicate about these missionaries' hearts for the church at Thessalonica?

Shortly after Paul had written and sent his first letter to this congregation of new believers, he received a report about more issues confronting them. They were facing fresh problems, and Paul—as was his custom—invested great care in replying via a written letter. The greeting in 2 Thessalonians is nearly identical to the greeting in 1 Thessalonians. Paul, Silas, and Timothy identified themselves, their audience, and their hope for their audience.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-5.

From these verses, what had happened since Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians? How had persecution affected this church?



What was the evidence of God's work in the Thessalonian believers' lives?

At the outset of this letter Paul reminded the Thessalonians that God had already worked in their lives. Further, God continued to give evidence of His presence and power in their lives. As those who had received grace from God, they already had come to know He had been more than fair with them, despite their troubles. Paul was impressed with the faith of these Christians, and he noticed that their love was growing in their dealings with one another. Further confirmation of God's work in these believers was their endurance or perseverance in the persecutions they faced. We know little about whether these afflictions were a continuation of the first troubles this church endured (Acts 17:1-5; see also 1 Thessalonians 3:3-5), or they faced a new kind of difficulty brought about by hostile people.

What might these words of gratitude and thanksgiving from Paul have meant to a group of people struggling to keep their faith in adversity?

Paul thanked the Lord for the Thessalonians' steadfast faith, their love for each other, and their enduring hope. How might growing in these three areas help us and others be more thankful to God?

When you find yourself facing persecution or adversity, what brings you patience and hope?

Why is it important to spend time reflecting on the things God has done for you and the ways He has blessed you? How might doing so help increase your faith in God? Your love for others?

If you received a letter or email from someone who had been helpful in leading you to Christ, it might open with words like those Paul used to open 2 Thessalonians. The writer would be happy to boast to someone else about what God had done in your life. Perhaps this Christian would think not only about when you were converted but also would point out what God is still doing in your life. Comprehending what God has already accomplished in our lives will help us realize we can continue trusting Him. He has already been more than fair to us.

Does "clear evidence" matter? Isn't it enough that God knows your heart? Or should there be evidence in our lives that we are enduring in faith and showing love to other people?

When believers endure patiently in the face of troubles, they show clear evidence that something good still lies in the future: the righteous judgment God will render to every person. Judgment in this case is not condemnation; rather, it results in a favorable verdict for Christians.



APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which is most difficult for you—increasing faith in God or growing in love for others? What is one step you could take this week to grow in that area?

Why is growing in love for the other members of FBC Summit an essential aspect of evidence of Christ in you?

What evidence would outsiders have that FBC Summit is “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”? How can we grow in this?

PRAYER

Thank God for the work He has done to strengthen the faith of the members of FBC Summit. Pray that He would deepen the love that the members of your group have for one another. Ask Him to help your group members live in such a way that they give clear evidence of Christ in them.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week’s scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians.

October 30, 2022 --- 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

