

Message #2**I Thessalonians 1:1**

Just this past week I received a letter from someone and in it was an invitation to go to lunch. Now when I read that letter I took it as literal; not metaphorical or symbolic. It was a real written letter inviting me to a real lunch.

It is intriguing as to how inspired letters of the New Testament actually open. They open the same way that any other letter opens. What that teaches us is that the Word of God is designed to reveal God's literal truth to us in the way normal literal letters work. When you and I receive letters, we take them at face value and interpret them literally and that is the way the Word of God needs to be approached.

In **verse one** of this First Thessalonians letter and epistle, it opens the way a typical letter opened in the first century. This is the way inspired letters opened and also non-inspired letters. For example, we actually have in the Bible a secular letter written from Claudius Lysias to Felix and he opens the letter the same way Bible books open their letters (Acts 23:26-30).

The reason for this is because letters were typically written on scrolls and it was important that you state who the author was and who the letter was intended for up front, or you would have to unroll the entire scroll to figure it out. So this is the customary way that letters began.

Usually in letters of the first century, you had a three point beginning: A is writing to B and here is a greeting. So this was the normal, cultural, accepted way for a writer to begin a letter in the first century.

Now again this shows us that God's Word is given in a historical context and follows normal grammatical patterns. Inspired letters of God feature clause and sentence structure that fit the norm of the day.

In this opening verse, there are three introductions Paul presents:

INTRODUCTION #1 – Paul introduces the writer of the letter. **1:1a**

Now it is actually Paul who wrote this letter, but he introduces the Thessalonians and us to his apostolic team. Paul lists three key people who were obviously important to this church of Thessalonica. In fact, these are the same three people he will also include in his second letter (II Thess. 1:1). He is not mentioning these guys simply as a matter of courtesy. These three were connected to this church. This was the missionary team who had evangelized Thessalonica.

Since this is one of the first letters Paul wrote, it appears that Paul uses an order of list that does agree with spiritual seniority. However, what is interesting is that, grammatically speaking, there is no superiority or inferiority relationship presented by Paul. He uses coordinate connections "and" (καί) not subordinate conjunctions to present the idea that this is a co-equal team. Paul is the main guy, but he shares his ministry with his team and treats them as co-equal partners.

Now the three named here would mean something very special to these Thessalonians. It is interesting that Paul does not give any additional mention of identification other than simply naming them. He makes no distinctions between any of them, so we may assume that this is all he needed to say and the Thessalonians would realize this is a letter coming to us from God.

John Calvin believed that by virtue of the fact that Paul does not identify himself as an apostle, these people in Thessalonica knew he was a gifted apostle and recognized Paul for who and what he was, a powerful man of God. He apparently did not think he needed to spend a great deal of time defending his apostleship.

This is interesting in view of the fact that some were trying to undermine his ministry and authority. Obviously these Thessalonians had more sense than to allow themselves to be swayed by others.

Truth is Paul is the writer of this letter and that point may be proved by reading the letter (2:18; 3:5; 5:27). However, when Paul opens the letter, he immediately introduces the Thessalonians to three team members:

Apostolic Team Member #1 - They were introduced to Paul .

The first thing that catches our eye is that Paul does not identify himself as an apostle.

I Thessalonians is the second book Paul wrote and the first was Galatians and in the Galatians epistle that is the first thing he does, but he doesn't do to the Thessalonians. Why? He didn't have to. Apparently the Thessalonians had no trouble with this point.

The fact is Paul is the leading apostle of the grace Gospel and Grace Age. He called the grace Gospel "my gospel" (Rom. 2:16) and said the grace Gospel was one that had been specifically "entrusted" to him (I Tim. 1:11). In fact, Paul said the entire Age of Grace was a "stewardship" given to him (Eph. 3:2). So he is the key man of God for the Grace Age; he is the key apostle of God to the Grace Age.

However, he did not strut around telling people this all the time, even though it was true. He shared his ministry with trusted men and he viewed those connected with him as being critical people of God who were co-workers with him in the ministry. To these very Thessalonians Paul shared his authority and said it is "our gospel" (II Thess. 2:14), referring to those who were with Paul. Paul is the big name and those linked with Paul have also earned good names for themselves for all eternity. I think this is a very important point to see. When we attach ourselves to a key agent of grace, we do share in all that God does with that ministry.

I would like to illustrate this point by using Lewis Sperry Chafer as an example. Lewis Sperry Chafer is the man God raised up to form, lead and be President of Dallas Theological Seminary.

He was God's man for that work. Now many other men connected to him have since then earned good names for themselves. But quite honestly their link is to Dr. Chafer. Mr. Miles, who influenced thousands of students as President of the Grand Rapids School of the Bible, specifically told me that Dr. Chafer was the greatest influence of his life. If you read the theologies of Charles Ryrie or Floyd Barackman, you will discover that Dr. Chafer was the greatest influence on their lives. The same is true for John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost and others. All of these men have earned great names for themselves, but their link is to Dr. Chafer. Dr. Chafer did not strut around telling people how great he was, even though he was a great man of God. He shared his life and ministry with others.

That is exactly the way it was with men linked with Paul. They were good, godly men, but the thing that really set them apart is that they were linked with Paul. Paul is the key man of God and there is no point denying that. Silas and Timothy were important men and part of the reason for their importance is that they were linked with Paul and they are linked to this church.

This is where true eternal significance is found.

Apostolic Team Member #2 - They were introduced to Silvanus.

Silvanus is the Roman Latin name that Paul always uses, but when Luke refers to him he always uses Silas, which is his Greek name.

By a simple comparison of Acts 18:5 with II Corinthians 1:19 clearly establishes that they are the same man. Silvanus would be the name that would reflect his Roman citizenship and it may be the reason Paul used it.

Silas, or Silvanus, was a key man who first met Paul when he was in Jerusalem defending the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 15:22). He was a leading Jew (Acts 15:22), he had a gift of prophecy (Acts 15:32) and he was a skilled teacher of the Word (Acts 15:32). We also know that Silas was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:19, 37).

His first assignment was to travel with Paul to Antioch of Syria to communicate that the apostles and elders of the church of Jerusalem agreed with Paul's presentation of the grace Gospel.

Paul must have been impressed with this man because Paul chose Silas to become part of his apostolic team (Acts 15:40). He became an aggressive partner with Paul on his second missionary journey. He proved to be a faithful and loyal friend to Paul who was willing to lay his own life on the line for the grace Gospel.

Silas had gone with Paul into Thessalonica (Acts 17:4) and ultimately had to leave the city at night because people were out to kill them (Acts 17:10). It is somewhat strange, but after Paul left Corinth, Silas disappears. It is possible that he ended up with the Apostle Peter because Peter refers to a man by the name of Silvanus that he highly esteemed who was with him (I Pet. 5:12).

Apostolic Team Member #3 - They were introduced to Timothy .

It is clear that another team member with Paul and Silas was Timothy (Act 17:14-15). He too had apparently been with them in Thessalonica. He is not specifically named as one who had gone initially to Thessalonica. Timothy was half-Greek. He had been raised in the pagan city of Lystra (Acts 16:1). Timothy's Jewish mother's name was Eunice and his grandmother's name was Lois (II Tim. 1:5). They had probably come to faith under the ministry of Paul and they taught Timothy the things of God since he was small (II Tim. 3:15). Timothy had earned a good name for himself in two churches located 20-25 miles apart—Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2).

The relationship between Paul and Timothy was very special. Paul honors Timothy as being a partner with him in the salutation of four other epistles (II Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon). Plus, Paul writes Timothy two personal letters.

It is clear that all three of these men were loved and known by these Thessalonians. He simply states their names and that is all they needed.

INTRODUCTION #2 – Paul introduces the recipients of the letter. **1:1b**

Now there are a couple of observations we want to make about the recipients of the letter:

Observation #1 - The letter was written to the church .

The program of God in the O.T. is centered on a nation. The program of God in the N.T. is centered on the church. God hasn't forgotten His nation, He is just primarily working in the church.

If one is to accurately understand the written Word, one will need to be in a church that carefully teaches it, because these biblical books are written to churches. There is a power at church, there is a presence of God at church and there is a grasp of the Word of God at church that we will not get anywhere else.

This point is significant, because a great part of this letter has to do with biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy is for the church. It is not for the unsaved world. Now the word “church” (ἐκκλησία) means “called out.” So a church is a group of people who have been called out by God and put into his family.

Now this Thessalonian church was comprised of at least four different types of people who had been called by God, who were specifically named:

- 1) There were some Jews in the church (Acts 17:1, 4a).
- 2) There were some Greeks in the church (Acts 17:4b).
- 3) There were some high-ranked women in the church (Acts 17:4c).
- 4) There were some former idolaters in the church (I Thess. 1:8)

We have different genders, different ages, different ethnic backgrounds, different religious situations and different sins, but they are all sinners and they all came to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of the preaching and teaching of Paul. As John Stott said, the people here were either converted out of Judaism or paganism (*I & II Thessalonians*, p. 26).

Any person of any age or background who will believe in Jesus Christ will be saved and have a brand new connection to the written Word of God and to the church of God.

Observation #2 - The letter was written to the church in Thessalonica .

As we pointed out last time, Thessalonica was a “happening” city. It was a big city filled with all the things typical of a big city. It was a city that featured lots of opportunities for God’s Word and lots of opportunities for sin. The church here was a relatively new church, just a few months old and yet these were God’s people whom he saved and who formed a real local church in a real local city.

One of the things we see that is so impressive about this church is that this church not only loved Jesus Christ and the Word of God, but they had a passion to spread the truth (I Thess. 1:8). These people were excited about the truth of God. Obviously they made a difference in their world in Thessalonica.

Now the three men mentioned reflect in some ways the membership of the church. Paul and Silas were Jews and Timothy was part Gentile. This certainly reflects the membership of the church.

INTRODUCTION #3 - Paul introduces the divine greeting . **1:1c**

Now first we need to carefully observe that when Paul opens this letter, he uses one prepositional phrase to describe the Thessalonians connection to God. He says they are “in God” and “in Christ.” By using the preposition “in” just one time and connecting it to God the Father and God the Son, we immediately see the co-equality of the member of the Godhead.

God the Father is identified as God the Father and God the Son is identified as “Lord,” which means He is the sovereign master and ruler of everything; as “Jesus,” which means He is the only Savior who can give one a relationship with the Father, and “Christ,” which means He is the Jewish Messiah.

In other words, God the Father is God and God the Son is God and to have a relationship with God the Father one must have a relationship with God the Son and believe totally and completely in Him. This is a critical Pauline grace doctrine. The way you get into a relationship with God is to be in Christ and the way you get in Christ is to invite Christ to be in you.

What we also see is that Paul connects “the church of the Thessalonians” to this “in God” and “in Christ” relationship.

What this shows us is that the church has two spheres of existence; one in a city and the other in heaven. For example, we are Texas Corners Bible Church and we function in two spheres—Kalamazoo and heaven. We live on this earth and in this world, but we also have an organic union with heaven. Church life is more significant than one may realize, because it really does have a heavenly connection.

Now there are two specific nouns Paul uses in regard to the believers of this church that express more than just greeting, they express Paul's theology. Paul never reverses this word order because this word order is critical to true Pauline doctrine. You do not have peace with God until you have responded to the grace of God:

Noun #1 - Grace is to you.

Grace is the unmerited, undeserved, non-earned favor of God that is given to one who believes on Jesus Christ.

The acrostic that is often used to define grace is:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense

Noun #2 - Peace is to you.

Peace is the tranquility that comes to one who has believed on Jesus Christ. Theologically there are two types of peace one may have.

First, there is the positional peace with God that comes the moment one believes on Jesus Christ. When one believes on Jesus Christ, one is no longer at war with God. Until one believes on Christ, one is at enmity with God. But the moment one trusts Christ as Savior, that war is over.

Second, there is the practical peace of God that is given to the believer who pursues conformity to a biblical lifestyle.

Both grace and peace come from one source and that is God and the only way you may have a relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ. These Thessalonians had believed on Jesus Christ and that is why they had experienced the grace of God and the peace of God.