

The Miracle of Salvation

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Strong! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

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Listen to the words of an English pastor and puritan minister, John Flavel (1627-1691):

“Did Christ finish His work for us? Then there can be no doubt but He will also finish His work in us.”

- John Flavel

Introduction: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 1. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “Growing in Grace.”

Writing with his companions **Silvanus** (the ‘Silas’ of Acts 16:19ff, etc.) who was in another church near the Thessalonians, imprisoned in Philippi. Remember the miracle earthquake and their release from prison?

And of course **Timothy**, his young assistant, is named. Paul knows he can address the Christians in Thessalonica as “the congregation in God the Father and the Lord Jesus the Christ.”¹

He greets them on the basis of God’s nature of grace – God desires to show undeserved love and mercy to us. Grace is also God’s power – He graciously draws us to Himself. And then God’s peace, or the Old Testament concept is Shalom. God has come to you to set everything right. You are the first harvest of the new creation!

So Paul continues to tell us two things:

1. How we were saved (1:2-5). Next week we will cover:
2. How we grow in salvation (1:6-10)

This is something we always want to highlight, especially as new people are added to our church. The church is a divine and living entity. It is not a club or a mere human institution. It is a called out assembly of believers who have been separated from the world unto God’s special purposes. God is bringing about the new creation right now, and one day Christ will come and complete the work He has begun with a new heavens and a new earth.

So Paul begins with telling us how the Thessalonians and all of us are saved.

¹ Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (p. 89). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

I. The Miracle of Salvation, 1:2

Paul begins by thanking God, for salvation is a work of God. 1 Thes. 1:2, “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers.”

Sometimes we speak of the five “solos” of the reformation. They are beautiful reminders that salvation is a gift from God above, and we should thank and praise Him often for our salvation and the salvation of our forever family in prayer!

History of the Reformation, the Five Solas

By the way, the reformation began in the 16 century on October 31, 1517, when a German monk named Martin Luther challenged the public teaching of the Catholic church. He came to stand against what was sadly being taught at the time, the error that we somehow merit or earn our salvation by doing good works. So Luther came to represent five beautiful truths about our salvation, also known as the “five solas” which were Latin phrases.

The Five Solas

1. *Sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”): The Bible alone is our highest authority.
2. *Sola Fide* (“faith alone”): We are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ.
3. *Sola Gratia* (“grace alone”): We are saved by the grace of God alone.
4. *Solus Christus* (“Christ alone”): Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Savior, and King.
5. *Soli Deo Gloria* (“to the glory of God alone”): We live for the glory of God alone.

The five solas represent what Paul described almost 2000 years ago, that salvation is “of the Lord” and we should therefore not glory in ourselves, but praise and thank God in prayer often for our salvation. Are you thankful for your salvation?

A Divine Work, a Miracle

At any rate, Paul is thanking God because salvation is a miracle. So it was understandable for the apostle Paul and his companions to **give thanks to God always for all of them, making mention of them in their prayers** (v. 2). Paul, Silas, and Timothy thanked God continually **for all of them** because all the Thessalonian believers were the elect of God.²

Do we not all praise God continually for the salvation of people all around us? Perhaps God has saved people in your family. You thank God. Perhaps you’ve seen him save friends and even strangers. You thank God. Who else would you thank? Salvation is a “gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast” (**Eph. 2:9**).

II. The Evidence of the Miracle, 1:3

1 Thes. 1:3, “remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lots of Effort in Salvation!

While we do not save ourselves in any way, there is **evidence** of God’s saving grace. James says “Faith without works is dead.” If you are born again, Jesus is alive in you and there will be some sort of tangible evidence.

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 14). Chicago: Moody Press.

Paul speaks of lots of hard toil and effort: “**work** of faith,” “**labor** of love,” “**steadfastness** of hope.” Those are words that speak of effort.

Is there effort in the Christian life? You bet! Paul tells us to “run the race” to “labor (agonize) to the point of exhaustion” when we run (**1 Cor. 9:24-27**).

Philippians 2:12-13 reminds us that even though we toil and put forth great effort, that it is all because of God’s grace that we can toil. Paul tells us to: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹⁵ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

And we all know that **Ephesians 2:8-9** tell us we are saved by grace through faith and that it’s a gift of God, but sometimes we miss verse 10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Work of Faith

A true saving belief in Jesus Christ will always result in the mighty **work** of God that produces change in one’s nature or disposition. A **work of faith** is action representative of the transforming power of regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17).³ Faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9) and the result of a nature change.

Remember, faith is a result of a nature change that is performed by the Spirit and through the Word, as **Romans 10:17** clearly says, “so faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

1 Peter 1:23, “since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”

The “work of faith” lauded here is the Christian life, the deeds that result from the indwelling Spirit (Gal 5:16–26; cf. Eph 2:10). These are not prerequisites of salvation but the results of salvation in the lives of those transformed by Christ (1 Cor 6:1–4; 12:1–2).⁴ As we mentioned, James says “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:14-26).

So when we get right down to it, the work of faith is really a work of God (since faith is a gift, Eph. 2:8-9). But what is faith? Faith is seeing things according to God’s reality, and walking by that faith is the work of faith. The work of faith is the Christian walking according to the new reality of living which is revealed by the Spirit according to the Word of God.

It is not mere Bible reading that gives us this revelation. Certainly, the Bible is the revelation of God through the Spirit. But the Spirit can reveal truth that lines up with the Bible to people who have never read the Bible. I’ve seen this many times when I am giving the Gospel to someone. They will say things that line up with the Bible, and I see God’s Spirit working in them.

All that to say the “work of faith” that Paul saw in the Thessalonian believers, and which manifests in us is God working in us to reveal His reality. We walk by faith and not by sight.

Let me also say that the work of faith that God is doing in us every day is usually preceded by chaos or fear or temptation to worldly entertainment, vanity or pleasure. This is why it is called the “work of faith.” It is not by our senses. Faith means that instead of following our senses, we instead function according to God’s reality, revealed by His Spirit and according and through the Word. And we want to fear. We want to be distracted by the world. We want to be subdued by despair because of the chaos. But we instead walk by faith, living according to God’s reality in Christ’s present Kingdom, where joy and peace and self-control abide.

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Martin, D. M. (1995). *1, 2 Thessalonians* (Vol. 33, p. 56). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

And Paul exclaimed that he remembered their work of faith before God and Christ. Hallelujah!

Labor of Love

Love prompts us to labor! True Christians minister motivated by their love for others. Loving even one's enemies is an expression of the power of salvation (cf. Matt. 5:44; Gal. 6:10). Loving other believers is also evidence of salvation.⁵ The Apostle John is very clear that love is an identifying marker of a true believer. **1 John 3:10-11**, "By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."¹¹ For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

This does not mean we love one another because of everyone's preferences or cultures or commonalities. We love one another because we are God's children. We have many difference, but we all have the same faith, the same Spirit dwelling in us, the same God and Father over us, the same Lord and King, Jesus.

Steadfastness of Hope (Perseverance)

He's going to put a "steadfastness" or perseverance of hope in you because of Jesus' coming Kingdom. Life is messy. Bad things happen and we want to give up, right? God puts a "steadfastness of hope" in all His children.

Steadfastness is from the Greek word *hupomonē*, which conveys the idea of endurance or perseverance; literally, it denotes the condition of **staying firm under pressure**. It is closely related to the theological concept the Reformers called "the perseverance of the saints" (cf. Rom. 2:7; 2 Thess. 1:4; Rev. 14:12)—that is, Christians will hold fast to their hope until the end.⁶

What hope? Jesus promises that He is coming at any moment to establish His kingdom. His is a kingdom where there are no tears, no funerals, no pain, and where there is no pressure or disappointment or devastation. I can't wait for His kingdom. It is the hope of His kingdom that helps us so persevere.

Jesus says in **Matt. 24:13**, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." The idea is that we will demonstrate that we are one of God's children as we persevere. It's an identifying marker.

All of this flows out of **Ezekiel 36:26-27**, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to keep my decrees."

This is why Paul says in **Rom. 2:7**, that true Christians are "those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life..."

Our perseverance is a gift from God.⁷ We will not fall away. Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (**Jn. 10:28-29**).

⁵ MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 17).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷ Paul Washer, *Assured by God*, P&R, 2006, p. 19-20.

Romans 8:29, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Philippians 1:6 – Paul says, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Christ will complete His work in us – He will lead us in perseverance.

Now Paul moves to our mysteries behind your conversion. We will see this next week, that we are “love by God” and “chosen by God” (1 Thess. 1:4). These are things that are mysteries. Why should God love us, such sinful creatures? Why should He choose such rebels? It is according His own sovereign pleasure and purpose. Not all are chosen. Theologians call this the doctrine of election. And this doctrine is meant to offend you. It is there to offend your pride – to realize that God is God and you are helpless apart from Him. We will speak more of this and other mysteries of salvation, like God’s drawing and wooing us in salvation, and the Spirit’s ministry of illumination and conviction. We cannot see these things tangibly. And we certainly cannot understand why God would choose us. That is why they are called mysteries. We will see more of this next week.

Conclusion – All Boasting to Jesus

But for now, let us ask: How were we saved? It was a gift of salvation from beginning to end. He saved us. We came because He elected us. He drew us by His Word. He convicted us and illuminated us by His Holy Spirit. He gave us the gift of faith and repentance.

Therefore, all glory, honor, and praise belong to Him. We will boast in Him alone. Salvation is of the Lord!