

"The Local Church At Thessalonica"

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Introduction

1. It was on the second journey of Paul's missionary activity that this church was founded (Acts 17:1-4). Paul and his companions in the ministry (Silas and Timothy) provided the witness and God gave the increase of fruit.
2. The results of the preaching at Thessalonica included the conversion of some religious Greeks. There were also some women in the upper classes of the community. The Jews, however, got upset and caused no mean problem (Acts 17:5).
3. After Paul left the area, he was deeply concerned for the believers at Thessalonica. He wrote this letter to them in expression of that concern. The opening of that letter provides some basic considerations:

1. The WRITERS.

a. Paul. It is noteworthy that he does not refer to his position as an apostle. There was no apparent reason to do this. The relationship between him and the Thessalonians was such as to make such a notice unnecessary. He was born in Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia (Acts 9:11). He was a devout Pharisee prior to his conversion (Phil. 3:4-7). His education was in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, the grandson of the very famous Hillel (Acts 22:3). His conversion took place on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

b. Silas. His other name is probably Silvanus (1 Pet. 5:12). He joined the Gospel team with Paul for the second missionary journey when Barnabas and Paul had some difficulties (Acts 15:36-41). He was with Paul at Philippi (Acts 16:19, 25, 29), Thessalonica (17:4), and went to Berea with Timothy (17:14) and then to Athens (17:15) where he joined Paul at Corinth (18:5) to work with Paul (2 Cor. 1:19).

c. Timothy. Here is the beloved and faithful child of Paul in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2). He had godly parents on the maternal side (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:11, 15). He was approved by the brethren (Acts 16:2) and set apart for the ministry (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). He shared with Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:14) and was with Paul on his return from his third journey (Acts 20:4). He had a ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:22; 1 Tim. 1:3). He spent time with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 1:1; 2:19-22) and himself was imprisoned (Heb. 13:23).

2. The LOCATION. While we do believe in the universal "body of Christ" concept (1 Cor. 12:12, 13), there is also the truth of the local body of believers. Thessalonica was in fact a local church (cf. Rev. 2, 3). Thessalonians, Galatians, and

Corinthians are all addressed to the "church." Romans, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians were addressed to the "saints." "Church" literally means the "called out ones." This fits with the program of God for this age (Acts 15:15-18). The account in Acts 17:1-4 accords with this concept for "devout Greeks" and "chief women" were "persuaded and assigned" to establish the church at Thessalonica. This word, therefore, accents the divine side of salvation. A church is the work of God: He calls out people unto Himself!

3. The POSITION. Two items are listed. They are governed by one single preposition--"in." This affirms that the two objects of the one preposition are equal in nature and quality. It is a neat device by which the Holy Spirit avers forcefully the deity of our Lord and His co-equality with the Father.

a. In God the Father. God is called "Father" elsewhere (Gal. 1:1). It accents the paternalistic position of the "body of Christ" in relation to God. While societies might not appreciate this sort of idea, to the child of God it is a loving and precious one.

b. In the Lord Jesus Christ. The three names of our Savior are used here: 1)"Lord" which means He is the Sovereign. 2)"Jesus" which means that He is the Savior. 3)"Christ" which means He is the selected Messiah of Israel. In order, these names relate the Redeemer to: 1)eternity, 2)history, 3)prophecy.

4. The GREETING.

a. Grace. The verb for "rejoice" is derived from this root. Since the believers at Thessalonica were saved, this proposes the idea of grace for every daily concern (1 Pet. 5:10). That is a worthy way to address believing readers of a letter. It was, in fact, the normal way to greet in Greek, but it obviously has more significance here.

b. Peace. This is the general greeting to a person in Hebrew. But it is more than that in this context. The thought of God's peace for the church is surely involved. They had peace with God (Rom. 5:1). They knew the peace which had been made for them between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-13). This had been done through Him Who is our peace (Eph. 2:14). They were now having a share in the preaching of "peace" (Eph. 2:17). But God also provides "peace" (Phil. 4:6, 7). This latter item was probably dominant with Paul here. It is, therefore, true that there is peace with God, of God, and in God! Hallelujah!

Conclusion. Paul apparently had a very sweet relationship with the body of believers at Thessalonica. He had not been with them a long time, but sufficient to have them raveled around his heart. His burden for them as a church and as individuals is clearly marked in this letter.