

**A Church To Be Proud Of
2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

Often times in various Christian magazines certain churches are highlighted as being particularly outstanding. They may be considered outstanding because of their growth dynamics. Such as how a particular church went from 0 to 18,000 within less than 20 years or some such statistic. They may be considered outstanding because of their community involvement, such as how they have been successful at feeding the poor or assisting unwed mothers. Churches can be highlighted for many different things. Certainly, many of those things for which they may be highlighted for can be considered very good things. Even so, it is always interesting to see what caught the attention of the Apostle Paul; what enamored him about a particular fellowship.

What churches would show up in an article written by Paul? This leads us into our text. Let us look at **V. 4, “therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God.”** The Thessalonian church was a church to be proud of. Was it their buildings that captured the attention of the Apostle Paul? Obviously, this could not have been it for the simple reason they had no buildings. Was it their programs that caught his attention? Again, this certainly couldn't be; they had no programs. They did not have a children's Sunday school, an AWANA program, or even a daily Vacation Bible School. Was it their wealth? This certainly is not likely, since more likely than not they were a poor church. Was it their size? Not likely, since they were most probably a small church. What was it?

There were four features that made Paul and his companions proud of the Thessalonians, four very simple features. This morning we will be looking at those features, but before we can do this we need to get our bearings. Let us read **V. 1, “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians** begins the same way as **1 Thessalonians**. Paul is the author. Silvanus or Silas (Silas being the Jewish name and Silvanus the Roman name) and Timothy are fellow missionaries who are presently with him as he writes this epistle. Silvanus is no stranger to Paul. The church at Jerusalem in **Acts 15:22** selected him and a few other “leading men” to accompany Paul to Antioch in order to deliver a letter written by the Jerusalem council. In **Acts 15:32** he was called a prophet along with a man named Judas. Silvanus or Silas is no spiritual lightweight. When Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over the issue of John Mark, the Scriptures tell us that it was Silas that Paul chose to go with on his second missionary journey. It was during this second journey that Paul became acquainted with Timothy and he asked him to join he and Silas on their missionary journey. It was Timothy, being younger than Silvanus, that Paul, it would appear, was preparing to one day take his place in ministering to various Gentile nations.

The verse goes on to say, **“to the church of the Thessalonians.”** The city of Thessalonica was in the northern part of Greece in an area known as Macedonia. Thessalonica was the main city of that area. It was a large city and most likely had a population of around 250,000. The city was founded by one of the generals of Alexander The Great about 350 years before Paul ever arrived there. It was a maritime center and was therefore inhabited by many merchants, traders and sailors. It was a busy city. It was a decadent city. It was a depraved city. How long were Paul and

his companions in Thessalonica? **Acts 17:2** tells us that he was there for only three Sabbaths. He was forced out of Thessalonica and ultimately, ended up in Corinth with his companions. So in the spring of 50 AD, only months after fleeing Thessalonica and having been personally thwarted by Satan in returning to that city, he sent Timothy to find out how they were doing.

As you remember, Timothy returned with a wonderful report of what was taking place and it prompted Paul to write the Epistle of First Thessalonians. We are now in the fall of 50 AD or perhaps the winter of 51 AD, and apparently another report has come to Paul and this report has now precipitated this second letter.

This second letter will again address the issue of ongoing persecution of the Thessalonian church. It will again address continuing confusion concerning the second coming of Christ. And lastly, Paul will address the issue of disorderly conduct on the part of a few Thessalonians who had stopped working in anticipation of Christ's return.

In fact, these issues form a simple outline of the epistle. Chapter one deals with the issue of persecution and maintaining endurance and perseverance. Chapter two deals with additional instruction concerning Christ's return. And finally, chapter 3 deals with those who were refusing to work and how to respond to them. And, though he is dealing with serious issues, there is not an authoritative tone. There is a tenderness in this letter. Though there were problems present, they were not so severe as to destroy the testimony of this wonderful church.

So, going back to the beginning of this epistle, he begins with a commendation. This is a church to be thankful for. This is a church to be proud of. Why? Because of four simple realities.

GENUINE CONVERSION

The people that made up the Thessalonian church were genuine, born again believers. Look at **V. 1, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."** This is a regenerate church. This is a redeemed church. This is the same thing Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. Only one word is different. That word is the word "our." This change emphasizes God as the father of believers. This expression is actually quite unusual in the New Testament. The New Testament Scriptures repeatedly refer to God as father: they repeatedly refer to God as the father of the Lord Jesus, but rarely do we see God being referred to as "our father." Apart from this difference, these verses are the very same.

Having said this, let us go on to establish the very unique relationship that genuine, born again believers, such as these Thessalonians, have with their heavenly father. Notice the word "in." This very small but very important preposition emphasizes the vital union that exists between God and those who are truly His own. The followers of Confucius are not said to be "in Conscious." The followers of Buddha are not said to be in "Buddha." The followers of Islam are not said to be "in Mohammed" or "in Allah." It is only in Christianity is there such an intimate union of life.

Colossians 3:1-4 says, "If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things

above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (3) For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

These Thessalonians enjoyed this special union. Paul tells us that they were “**in God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Notice that Paul does not simply say that these Thessalonians were in “**God our Father,**” but he goes on to say, “**and our Lord Jesus Christ.**” These Thessalonians were in both. By putting them together in this way without explanation, Paul testifies to us of his belief that the Father and the Son had an equal standing. If the Father were elevated in preeminence over the Son, then what would have been most important to say would have been that the Thessalonians were in “**God our father.**” If the Son held a more elevated position than the Father, then what would have been most important to say would be that the Thessalonians were in “**our Lord Jesus Christ.**” It not only seems to communicate a perceived equality of the Father and the Son, but also a perceived unity. If we are in the Father, then we would be in the Son, and if we are in the Son, then we are in the Father. They share the same life, and we share their life by having been joined to them and being found in them.

Having been, by faith, placed into God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, we become the recipients of God’s grace and peace. Look at **V. 2**, “**Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**” Grace is God’s unmerited favor toward the sinner and peace is the result of that grace having been bestowed.

Paul was thankful for these Thessalonians. He was proud of these Thessalonians, first of all, because they had experienced a genuine conversion. They were truly a redeemed people. The church is not to be an association of believers and unbelievers. It is not to be a mixture. If we are going to call ourselves a church, then we must strive toward being an assembly of the redeemed. We are an assembly that gathers together on a Saturday night or a Sunday morning for the purpose of worship and edification, seeking to learn more about him.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-14 expands on Paul’s conviction concerning the Thessalonian church having experienced a genuine conversion and his response of thanksgiving. “**But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (14) And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Paul was thankful for the Thessalonians. Paul was proud of the Thessalonians because he had a certain confidence that they were a redeemed church: that they were beloved of God having been chosen before the foundation of the world, that they were brought into salvation through the hearing of the gospel and the sanctifying work of the Spirit and that they were presently heading toward glory. Whatever church Paul would select as truly an outstanding church would be characterized as having been genuinely converted. What might

he be specifically looking for in order to develop that conviction?

INCREASING FAITH

Let us look at **V. 3**, “**We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged.**” Paul was convinced that they were genuinely converted because he saw their faith. Not only did he see their faith, but he saw their increasing faith or enlarged faith.

You will remember that Paul in the first epistle had commended them for their “faith.” **1 Thessalonians 1:2** says, “**We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; (3) constantly bearing in mind their work of faith.**”

Even though he saw their faith, he wanted to see that faith increase. In **1 Thess. 3:10** Paul says, “**as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith.**” How can faith be seen? Faith is seen in the midst of adversity. It is seen in the midst of hardship. It is seen in the midst of weariness. That is when faith is seen.

Certainly this was true of the Thessalonians. In **1 Thess. 3:7** Paul shared this thought with the Thessalonians, “**For this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith.**” How can faith be seen? It is seen in the midst of adversity and persecution. If there is any doubt concerning this, all you have to do is read **V. 4**, “**Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.**” Paul had seen their faith in the initial persecutions they experienced, and he has apparently seen in the most recent reports about them an even enlarging faith as those persecutions continued to be heaped upon that young church.

Persecution destroys a false faith!! Persecution and adversity will never destroy a genuine faith. Remember the story of the mustard seed that fell on the shallow soil? True faith is indestructible. Why? Because Jesus will not allow our faith to be destroyed. Remember Paul’s encounter with Peter in **Luke 22:32**? Jesus told Peter what Satan’s intention had been, but then he told that he had prayed for him that his faith would not fail.

No matter how stressing, no matter how hard, no matter how troubled the time or events, no matter how deep the pain as a result of our pursuit of righteousness as we minister in the name of Jesus to the lives of people whether inside or outside, the church’s true faith will not falter. We will keep on keeping on no matter what. But there is more. Not only did the Thessalonians genuine conversion evidence itself in their faith and in their enlarging faith but also in their growing love.

GROWING LOVE

Again let us look at verse three. **“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.”** We are not talking about a superficial sentimentality, but rather a love that makes sacrifices for people. Certainly, Paul in his earlier letter had acknowledged that they were already very strong in this area. In **1 Thess. 1:3** it said, **“constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love.”** But Paul was not satisfied.

In **1 Thess. 3:12** he prays, **“And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you.** As the reports from Thessalonica continued to come to Paul, he continued to hear about their love for one another.

Even though the persecution of the Thessalonian church continued and, most likely, was increasing, their faith continued to respond accordingly, and their love for one another did not falter. Can we make sacrifices for one another? Can we make sacrifices for one another even in the midst of our pain? Can we make sacrifices for one another in our continuing and increasing pain? This is the measure of the church.

CONCLUSION

Where do we stand as a church? Is the union with God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ causing us to move forward in faith? Even in the midst of suffering and difficulty, is the union with God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ causing to grow in our love for one another? Causing us to give ourselves up in the midst of persistent and growing difficulty? If this is true of us, then we have much to rejoice in. But no matter how strong or weak we might be, hopefully we better understand what is important, and we might be striving to be like the church of Thessalonica.