

## I Thessalonians 1:1-3 The Characteristics of the Thessalonians

In case you did not notice in your study guide today there is a map of Paul's second missionary journey. We are going to be using this map here for the next few moments, so you might want to take note of that.

Today we are beginning Thessalonians, First Thessalonians. First Thessalonians is five chapters long. Second Thessalonians is three chapters long. So we will take these two letters and draw off of and glean from what Paul has to say to those in Thessalonica.

Paul's first missionary journey is not on here. This is his second missionary journey. His first missionary journey - he left Antioch, and Antioch is straight north of Jerusalem. It is Antioch of Syria, not Assyria but Syria. What happened was persecution against the church in Jerusalem and the believing Jews fled the area and went into Judea and Samaria, and many wound up in Antioch. And many people - Greeks, Hebrew - many believed in the Lord in Antioch. And Antioch became the center of all the missionary journeys - not Jerusalem, but Antioch of Syria.

So Paul went to Antioch. He heard what was going on there and he went and ministered there. He started off in Antioch in his first missionary journey and went down and to the left to the island of Cyprus. From there he went straight north to the mainland Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. And it is there that Timothy, young Timothy, came to know the Lord in Lystra. And then he returned to Antioch after the first missionary journey.

In the second missionary journey, Paul decides to visit the churches that he ministered to at the beginning. Except he decided instead of going by sea, and by way of the island of Cyprus, that he was going to go by land. So he started off in Jerusalem, got up to Antioch. He had Silas with him. Silas, he is known as Sylvanus in our text. Silas was member of the committee that made the judgment and ruling in Acts chapter 15 regarding whether Gentiles could be saved and whether Gentiles needed to keep the law. And the Jerusalem Council decided that Gentiles could be saved in the same way the Jews were saved by the coming of the Holy Spirit, but that the Gentiles did not need to keep the law. So Paul took Silas, a committee member, went up to Antioch, and from there they took the second missionary journey to go bring this word to the various churches; plus minister to churches that he had never ministered to before.

So he leaves Antioch, goes up through Cilicia to Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra where he went during his first missionary journey. While in Lystra during the second missionary journey, the people commended Timothy to him, said, "He is worthy to take with you to help out with the missionary work." And so, Timothy joined up with Silas and Paul. They took off from there and began to go west across Asia. And when he got to right where the map says *Asia*, right at that line right up above it, showing his traveling - he wanted to go to Asia to preach the gospel. But Acts chapter 16 verse 6 says he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia. It does not say how. And then in Acts chapter 16 verse 7 it says he tried to goad to Bithynia. Tried to go north, but the Spirit did not permit them to go. Again, it does not say how they hindered them

and stopped them. But the Lord did not want them to go, either to Asia or to Bithynia. So they kept on going straight over to Troas, on the seacoast by Mysia, and just waited there.

They were prevented from going north, prevented from going south, so they went straight ahead, and were in Troas and did not know which way to go. So Paul received what is called the Macedonian vision. A man appeared to them from Macedonia, which is the name of the area across the sea there, and the man said in the vision, "Come over here and preach the gospel to us." So Paul and Silas and Timothy took shipping, went over to Neapolis, and went to Philippi. This is the church that Paul wrote the Philippians letter. This is his first time there, Philippi. He ministered the gospel there and many were saved. Then he goes down to Amphipolis and Apollonia before cutting over to Thessalonica; and that is this church that this letter is written to, to Thessalonica.

And again, many people are saved. They are staying at the house of a man by the name of Jason who received the Lord. And so the nonbelieving Jews went down to the marketplace and got some thugs together and decided they were going to bring persecution against Paul. And they came against Jason's house and beat him, beat the people that were there. And so they got Paul to leave Thessalonica and Silas and Timothy.

The characteristic of this church, the main characteristic of Thessalonica is that they are brand-new believers, and this is the first time that persecution has actually risen up against the church outside of Jerusalem. And so they had to suffer persecution right off the bat. They had no grace period, no growth period. They either had to walk with the Lord and be persecuted for it, or be tempted to leave the things of the Lord because it was a hardship and how difficult it is.

So Paul and Silas and Timothy leave Thessalonica and go down to Berea. They minister in Berea and the mob from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea and brought persecution against him in Berea. So the Christians in Berea decided to send Paul on his way. You can see him going down. He eventually wound up in Athens, but he left Silas and Timothy in Berea. And so he is in Athens, he preaches the gospel there, and then he goes over to Corinth. And when he is in Corinth, he calls for help from various brothers to go and get Silas, and go and get Timothy back in Berea. He wants to send them to Thessalonica and find out how they are doing. Paul is very concerned. Young Christians under extreme persecution and hardship, he wants to know how they are doing.

He also is going to commend them, as we follow through this letter. We will follow him through this letter, where it is going to talk about how the testimony of this church is heard throughout the world, the known habitable world, as an example of how Christians keep the faith. How Christians stay firm in the midst of difficulties. So this letter is commending them for the testimony that they have.

While in Corinth he sends for Timothy and Silas, and he sends Timothy back to Thessalonica and he has him find out how things are going there. We will get Timothy's report in chapter 3 when we get in the I Thessalonians, where Paul is commending them for their testimony. After Timothy returns to Corinth and gives Paul the word, and after he writes his two

letters to Thessalonica, Paul returns to Ephesus, and then back over down to Jerusalem, and up to Antioch to report what happened on this missionary journey.

In I Thessalonians we are focusing on chapter 1 verses 1 through 3. Chapters 1 through 3 is The Inspiration of the Believers in Thessalonica, they inspired people to follow the Lord. They inspired people to trust the Lord. I Thessalonians chapter 1 is The Testimony of the Thessalonians. Chapter 2 will be The Testimony of Paul. And chapter 3 will be The Testimony of Timothy, as he brings word as to how these Christians are holding up.

In I Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1, the circumstances of the letter. It starts off by saying, **Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the assembly of Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.** And some texts do not have *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*, but it is in our text and should belong there. Letters in those days were on scrolls. Just like in our envelopes we put return address at the top and the person to whom it is written down below on the envelope. In the scrolls they were made pretty much in the same fashion. To find out who it is from and who it is to they would put this inscription at the top, so they can know the sender and the receiver of the letter.

It starts off by saying, **Paul and Silvanus and Timothy.** *Paul* is Paul's Roman name. It is from Latin origin, and it means *small*. *Saul* is his Jewish name and it means *to ask* or *be on demand*. Then *Silvanus*, that is his Roman name, again like Paul. He is a Roman citizen like Paul is. But *Silvanus* is known as *Silas* in the Scriptures. That is his Jewish name, *Silas*. *Silvanus* means *a man of many words* or *wordy*. And then *Timothy*. Young Timothy was joined by Paul and Silas when they passed through Lystra during this second missionary journey as we mentioned earlier. The word *Timothy* means *honoring God*.

So we have these three traveling together. All three of them are now in Corinth where Paul is writing the letter with Silas and with Timothy there by his side. And with Timothy in his testimony as to what is going on Thessalonica with the Christians there. So it is from Paul and Silas and Timothy to the assembly of Thessalonians. Notice it is the word *assembly*, not the word *church*. In all English Bibles the word *church* is used here to describe to whom it is written, but the literal translation is the word *assembly*.

Our English word *church* does not come from the Biblical word *church*. The word *church*, *kyriakē dōma*, is the word for *church building*. *kyriakē dōma*. It is also the words used for church organization, which is not in the Scriptures. The word *church* as it applies to believers is the word *assembly*. It is the name of the people. It is the people who assemble in the name of God. That is why it says *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. So it was the assembly of believers that are in Thessalonica in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then he says to them in greeting, **Grace to you and peace.** *Grace* is the Greek greeting, *grace*. And *peace* is the Jewish greeting. Grace and peace. Paul right away is expressing his motive for writing the letter is that God's grace and God's peace would touch them and minister to them and bring them comfort and strength. And this is spiritual grace and spiritual peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He goes on to say, in talking about The Characteristics of the Thessalonians, **We give thanks to God always concerning all of you, making mention of you upon the occasion of our prayers.** Interesting the word *thanks*, *thanksgiving* is a response. It is reflective. The word *thanks* come from two words, **εὖ** (eu) is a prefix that means *well* and **χαριστέω** (charisteō) comes from *grace*. It means *to have a good response to grace*. So, *we thank God upon remembering you* - it was grace that motivated Paul and the others to give thanks.

**Concerning all of you making mention of you upon the occasion of our prayers.** So the three of them have a prayer meeting going on there. Wherever they are traveling, they are remembering these hardship believers. **Remembering without ceasing...**  
There are three phrases here:

**your work of faith,**

**your labor of love,**

**and the endurance (or patience) of hope**

**of our Lord Jesus Christ before God and our Father.** There are three phrases that express the characteristics of the testimony of the Thessalonians. And I want to share with you technical points as to how they are used in the Greek text.

**Work of faith** is the first one. It expresses a work that is produced by faith, not the other way around. It is not faith produced by work, it is the work of faith.

Secondly, it is the **labor of love**. Love is the motivator. Love is the one producing the labor.

And the **patience (or endurance) of hope**. Hope is producing the patience. Hope is producing the endurance.

The first phrase, *the work of faith*. The word *faith* is the Greek word **πίστις** (pistis) and it means *persuasion*. Persuasion. It is a word that describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When God's Spirit ministers, He persuades, that is His ministry and it is called *faith*.

We are told in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 that Jesus is the source of faith, not people. It says, **Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.** Faith is authored by Jesus, and he brings it to its completion.

In Galatians chapter 5 verse 22 it says that **Faith is produced by the Holy Spirit.** Galatians 5:22.

And then in I Corinthians chapter 12 verse 9 that **Faith is given by the Holy Spirit.**

So the interaction of the Holy Spirit with me and His ministry to me is called *persuasion*. He is persuading me and convicting me of the things of Christ - that is called *faith*.

Faith produces activity. That is what the word *work* means. Work of faith and labor of love. The word *work* means *activity*. And the word *labor*, coming up next, is was the word *labor to the point of exhaustion*.

For activity, in James chapter 2 verse 14 James says, **What does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can faith save him?** And the Greek text in James offers the answer, no. Faith cannot save him if there are no works produced by faith. If faith is not active, a person is not saved. He says in James chapter 2 verse 20, **Faith without works is dead.** Notice it is not *works without faith*, but *faith without works*. It is faith that works, not works that faith. So, **Your work of faith.** They had a testimony of having faith of Christ in the midst of crisis in the midst of hardship, that is their testimony. They lived under the persuasion of God's Spirit.

Next is **Labor of love.** The word *love* is the word **ἀγάπη** (agape), **ἀγάπη** (agape) love, **labor of love.** The word *labor* means *laboring to the point of exhaustion*. So what motivates them to labor to the point of exhaustion for Christ is **ἀγάπη** (agape) love. Again, that is produced by God's Spirit. In Galatians chapter 5 verse 22 again, that **ἀγάπη** (agape) love is produced by God's Spirit. In I John chapter 4 verse 8 it says, **God is love.** Love is not an action. Love is the very person, and character, and nature of God Himself. And His Spirit motivates people to labor based on love.

And thirdly, **In the endurance of hope**, or *patience* as the English translations have it: *the patience of hope*. There are two words for *patience* in the Scriptures. One is **μακροθυμία** (makrothumia), which means *long-suffering*. It has to do with people, be slow in human reaction. But then there is another word for *patience*, **ὑπομονή** (hupomonē). It means *endurance* and it has to do with circumstances, to remain under. That is the word that is used here. Endurance, to remain under. And it is produced by hope. Interesting that the Greek word hope, **ἐλπίς** (elpis) has to do with a hope of certainty. Not a wish, like *I hope so*, that is a wish. I hope things happen. That is a wish. **ἐλπίς** (elpis) in Greek is *a hope of certainty*.

The best example that I know of is a person who has been shipwrecked and they are floating around out in the ocean. And they see nobody in sight, and they have a wish, a hope, that they get seen. Then all of a sudden, the ship shows up on the scene and the ship signals him that we see you and we are coming to pick you up. Now he has a hope of certainty. Not a wish, the hope of certainty that this ship is going to pick him up.

And so they are remaining under their difficult circumstances based on the certainty of the hope of Christ because He is there. He is here and He is coming. And that is why later on in the book in chapters 4 and 5 of I Thessalonians Paul is going to address the coming of Christ. Some of them in Thessalonica were told that Christ had already come for His church, His assembly. And he was going to write to them to tell them about this hope. Their hope was shaken a bit because they thought the certainty of Christ's coming had already happened. But he is going to let them know it has not happened.

Now, all of this endurance motivated by hope, the hope of Christ is what motivates them is the third phrase used to describe the testimony of the Christians in Thessalonica. They are

known for their work of faith, their labor of love, and endurance of hope. But notice the next phrase in verse three - not *in* our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is literally *of*, **of our Lord Jesus Christ**. All of these are of Him, the work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope, is all of Christ. It is all His gift given by His Spirit to the believers there in Thessalonica and for all believers. This is not only **of our Lord Jesus Christ**, but **before God and our Father**, before His presence.

That exhausts our time for today. It is quite a letter of encouragement for believers who are facing difficulty to hear how the Christians in Thessalonica were encouraging and an encouragement to believers around the habitable world at the time and amongst us as we study this letter. Let's close with prayer.