



1 Thessalonians

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We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,
1 Thessalonians 1:2

This is a greeting which, even if slightly amended for the occasion, is common to Paul's letters. In some letters, the stress is on the thanks, in others it is on the prayers. It is rather close to the words of Colossians 1:3 -

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,”

However, when he wrote his letter to the Thessalonians, he noticeably gives thanks “to God” rather than “to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He has already carefully placed Christ Jesus within the Godhead in the previous verse, and so the thanks are obviously to Him as much as they are to the Father. Therefore, Paul combines the two into the simpler term “God.”

Here he notes that he, Silvanus, and Timothy “give thanks to God always for you all. These thanks are lifted to God, who is both Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As always, his wording highlights the deity of Christ. There is the human Jesus, and there is the Christ of God, being God. He is the Lord Jesus Christ who issues from God the Father, and who dwells with the Father in the Godhead. It is to this God that their thanks are directed at this point.

In their thanks, he then notes that they are “making mention of you in our prayers.” Paul's idea of “praying without ceasing,” which he will state later in this epistle, is evident in words such as these. Whenever the thought of one of his beloved churches came to mind, he and those with him would utter forth a prayer to God on its behalf. When they talked about one of the churches, they would probably issue forth a quick prayer of both thanks and petition for it. To them, praying was certainly a normal extension of their regular lives and conversations.

τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων

Life application: God already knows the end from the beginning. His plan is also complete in His mind. Despite this, we should not have a fatalistic view of life where we ignore prayers. Instead, God figures our prayers into the plan, just as our free-will calling on Jesus is figured into the plan. If we don't receive Jesus, we will not be saved. Likewise, prayers that are not uttered are not heard. God's foreknowledge of all things outside of time factors in our actions within the stream of time. Pray!

...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Paul now details what is specifically included in the prayers concerning those at Thessalonica that he referred to in the previous verse. He says they are "remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope."

These are the three tenets which he beautifully wrote about to the Corinthians – faith, hope, and love. Each of these is in the genitive, and so they, as noted by Charles Ellicott, are "almost equivalent to a very emphatic adjective." In other words, "work of faith" would equate to "faithful activity." In this it is a kind of work which is "characterized by faith and promoted by faith" (Ellicott). "Labor of love" would equate to "loving labor." It is a labor worked out because of, and for the sake of, love. And "patience of hope" would equate to "hopefully patient." It is a patience which is grounded in hope, and which is continuously nurtured by that same hope.

Each of these traits is in those at Thessalonica, as Paul says, "in our Lord Jesus Christ." What is more appropriate is "of our Lord Jesus Christ." In all three of these traits, Jesus is the object, not the subject. We have the hope of our Lord in our work of faith. We have hope of our Lord in our labor of love, and we have hope of our Lord in our patience of hope. Because He came, because He is with us, and because He is coming again, we have this hope, fully and completely.

Finally, he notes that our hope of the Lord Jesus Christ is "in the sight of our God and Father." This means basically "before," or "in the presence of." Because of our hope in Christ, the attentive eyes of our heavenly Father are upon us. He is pleased to have a relationship with us once again because of the merits of Christ. He is our Redeemer and Mediator, and so in Him and through Him, we are brought into the very presence of God.

Life application: Paul's words of this verse show us that our works are to be works of faith in order to be pleasing to God. Any work not done in faith will not be credited to our account of heavenly rewards. Every work, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will be credited to us if it is done in faith. In all ways, and at all times, our walk with the Lord comes down to

faith. We are saved by faith, we are justified by faith, and our works are credited to our account when done in faith.

...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 1 Thessalonians 1:4

The translation of the NKJV (which follows after the KJV) is completely wrong. It should read “...knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election...” The words, “by God” are tied to “beloved,” not “election.” As Vincent’s word studies accurately states, “neither here nor elsewhere in the N.T. is there any warrant for the revolting doctrine that God has predestined a definite number of mankind to eternal life, and the rest to eternal destruction. The sense in this passage appears to be defined by the succeeding context. The Thessalonians had been chosen to be members of the Christian church, and their conduct had justified the choice.”

In other words, the translation which ties “by God” to “election” is intended to support the Calvinist belief that God has pre-elected all who will be saved. To them, only those will be saved, and the others He has pre-elected to be destroyed; free will is not involved in the process. As Vincent notes, this is a revolting doctrine. It also cannot be supported by a right dividing of the word of God.

Rather, Paul says to those at Thessalonica, “knowing, brothers beloved by God...” He is stating that they are beloved by God because they have come to God through Christ. God knew this would occur, but it does not negate the fact that it occurred. God granted them the choice, they chose, and God saved. From there, Paul mentions “your election.” This is tied into “knowing.” They know their election because they have called on Christ. This is what John 3:16 shows will happen, this is what Paul’s letters say will happen, and this is how it works. When a person freely believes in Christ, they become the elect of God.

Life application: John 3:16 does not say, “For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever is pre-elected by God, is regenerated in order to believe, and then believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” No, it does not say this. If you are separated from God, call on Christ, be forgiven of your sins, and be reconciled to your heavenly Father.