

April 11, 2021  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: 2 Thessalonians  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2021 David J. Whitcomb

## IT IS RIGHT TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

This is hard to believe, but back in the olden days we students were required to learn hand writing skills in elementary school. That really is the way it was. Each week we would have an hour long class dedicated to writing correctly, that is, correctly according to the examples we were supposed to follow. It was the same exercise, the same process over and over which was intended to shape our writing skills so that others might be able to read what we wrote. For some of us it didn't do much good.

In fact, isn't repetition the way we learn many skills? The young pianist begins by playing the same C major scale over and over. Almost all instruments involve playing the same scales over and over until parents feel like they are going to lose their minds.

The same kind of practice is necessary for God's people if we will know God and be conformed to His image. God specifically required His people to teach His commands to their children over and over. He required, *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)*. But God's people didn't care for learning by repetition.

About 500 years later even the religious leaders—the priests and the prophets, mocked God's method of repetitious truth. In Isaiah's prophecy we find drunken prophets and priests mocking God's messenger for teaching. They mocked, *Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little (Isaiah 28:10)*.

The man of God responded to the drunks telling them that the day was coming when God would send the Assyrian army to overthrow them and guess what would happen? The Assyrians would issue command after command that they didn't want to hear! Isaiah put it like this: *And the word of the LORD will be to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken (Isaiah 28:13)*.

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians sounds a bit like that. As you read through these three short chapters, you realize that you have already seen a lot of this stuff in the previous letter (1 Thessalonians). Repetition in teaching is necessary because we easily forget what we have learned. It is also necessary because questions arise or problems pop up that are very similar to what we have already dealt with, only they come in new forms. Our study in 2 Thessalonians will confirm the character-altering work of the gospel, various aspects of end times, and the need for Christlike thinking and activity within the Body of Christ.

### A Brief Introduction.

*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.1)*. The opening words of the letter would indicate that this letter has the same author as did 1 Thessalonians. There is little doubt in the minds of most Bible readers that Paul wrote the letter. There is virtually no argument from conservative scholarship that Paul wrote this letter also. That conclusion is based partly on the fact that there is much evidence that the early church took it for granted that this letter came from Paul.

In fact, there are two statements within the letter where Paul identified himself as the author. The opening salutation lists, *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy*. Of course one could argue that the author could have been Silvanus or Timothy. But later, near the end of the letter we read, *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write (2 Thessalonians 3:17)*. To many of us, that makes an open and closed case.

However, there actually are some weak arguments against Pauline authorship. Some modern critics argue that the eschatology taught in this letter contradicts that of 1 Thessalonians. We know from our previous study that in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul taught the sudden, imminent appearing of Christ. But 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 teaches that the coming of the Lord will be preceded by the signs of extreme rebellion and the man of sin (“lawlessness”). The solution to this non-dilemma is that 1 Thessalonians teaches about the rapture while in 2 Thessalonians Paul taught about the tribulation period just before Christ comes to earth to establish His kingdom. Other critics claim that 1 Thessalonians appears to speak to Gentiles while 2 Thessalonians has strong Jewish overtones. That argument just doesn’t hold water. The focus of both letters is very similar.

The letter has not only the same author, but also the same recipients. The recipients were still new Christians in Thessalonica. It is likely that Paul wrote this letter just a few months after writing the first letter. That is probably why we still find his references to the people’s acceptance of the gospel. For example, *But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:12-14).*

The recipients were still growing Christians in Thessalonica. Paul commended their continuing spiritual growth by writing, *We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing (2 Thessalonians 1:3).* And he still had the desire for the new Christians to find comfort in Jesus. *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).* Paul was confident the people will continue to grow. *And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command (2 Thessalonians 3:4).*

This letter is also similar to the first letter to the Thessalonians in content. Here we find a fuller dealing with persistent problems.

The people were still facing persecution (1:5-6). Some of the people were still being irresponsible and not working (3:6-11). Along with the similar issues we find Paul’s fuller explanation of the Day of the Lord. The focus on this part of the Day of the Lord is on the extreme wickedness in the world that will accompany the man of sin (2:3-4). This was not new information or information that contradicted previous teaching. Paul had given this teaching in conjunction with the “rapture” teaching while he was with the new Christians the few short days before he was driven out of Thessalonica. He called out the people to remember what he had already said. *Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things (2 Thessalonians 2:5)?*

### **Praise for Steadfast Faith in Persecution (vv.2-4).**

Coming to verse two, we are still technically in the greeting part of the letter. Here we find a fitting greeting that read, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.2).* We readily see that Paul offered two blessings to his friends. Does this greeting not sound pretty typical, pretty ordinary for Paul? Yes, this is a very typical greeting, not only for Paul, but for Christians in general who would write to each other in the day before email, text, twitter, and the “hey” kind of greeting. Paul used this exact greeting or very similar greeting in virtually every letter he wrote. Peter put it in both of his letters (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2). John used it in 2 John (1:3).

Therein lies an inherent danger. If we are not diligent, we can allow familiarity to breed contempt so that this simple blessing becomes meaningless. To that end, let’s stop to consider the two-fold blessing. First is the greeting, “grace to you.” Surely most Christians are aware that grace is simply the favor of God. More importantly, it is the undeserved favor of God. This favor from God is given to all people all the time in what we call common grace. Common grace makes up such things as sunlight, air, water, and such. Indeed, physical life itself is all a matter of God our creator showing undeserved favor to all creatures. It should be astounding to us that this common grace proves that God shows this favor to His worst

enemies who scorn Him, reject Him, claim He doesn't exist and purposely sin against Him causing Him pain.

But in this greeting is the expressed desire for God's special favor to His people. God's grace, His favor chose sinners like you and me to be reconciled to Him before He created the universe. God's incredible favor convicted us of sin and drew us to Christ while we were running away from Him and rejecting Him. God's incomprehensible favor gave me faith to trust Jesus' sacrifice alone to pay the penalty for my sin. And God's favor continues to draw His people into fellowship with their Savior day by day. His amazing favor continues to sustain us in the spiritual battles throughout the day. God's undeserved favor keeps shaping me and molding me into the image of my Savior who I am so much unlike by nature. May God grant us more grace according to His riches in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:7).

But there is more! Paul also desired for God's peace for the readers. This is a peace the world cannot offer. The world's peace is not real, and, therefore, it is incapable of lasting. In fact, the world doesn't really offer peace but only distractions from the horrible reality that we are by nature at war with God.

The peace from God is the unique, special condition that only the one who is in fellowship with God can enjoy. The old Hebrew greeting *shalom* approaches the idea. That was spoken as a desire for one's welfare, prosperity, or health. It wished completeness, soundness, or safety for the recipient. But especially among God's people *shalom* referred to peace with God especially in the covenant relationship.

For the Christian, this peace is a matter of living in tranquil relationship with our Creator as we fulfill His desire for us – enjoying Him forever. This peace is the quietness, rest, and tranquility of the soul because of our relationship with Christ. Therefore, this peace must by nature transcend human understanding, explanation, and resource. *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).*

Paul listed a two-fold source of the two-fold blessing. First, we receive grace and peace from God our Father. God our Father is Creator and Master of all things and all people. That means that

because of natural sin, we are war with the very source of grace and peace. We must appeal to Him for grace and peace.

The second source of grace and peace is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only ordained Savior from sin. He paid the price for the penalty for sin through His torture, suffering, and crucifixion. He won the victory of sin, death, and Satan when He rose from the dead. Therefore, He is rightly our Lord, our Master.

But more than being the head of His people, Jesus Christ is the Lord and Master over every person in history. Paul taught the Corinthian Christians, *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3).* But every person does not acknowledge that Christ is Master now. No, but the day is coming when they will. Because of the Son's willing sacrifice, *God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).* That acknowledgment will come at the very least when all people face Jesus Christ as eternal Judge. *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom (2 Timothy 4:1).* And yet the Judge of all the ages is also the channel for matchless grace and peace through His obedient life and death.

There is a fitting resolution to the reality that God pours out His grace to give us peace. It is right to give thanks. *We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right (v.3a).* It is encouraging for us to stop to consider who the "brothers" are in this statement. The term included all the born again men and women in the assembly at Thessalonica. The term includes all of us who have been moved by God's grace from being children of sin and Satan who deserve wrath, to being children of God who live and walk in light.

But in a most direct application, we in this local assembly really are brothers and sisters. It is right to always give thanks to God for each other. It is good and right to express genuine thanks for each other. But it is good and right to first be thankful to God for each other. Apart from God's grace and kindness, there is no Church universal or local. Apart from God's grace, no one is hear to

encourage us or to be encouraged by us. Apart from God's grace, this organism we call CBC would never exist.

Therefore, there is plenty of good reason for thanksgiving. *Because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing (v.3b)*. One reason for being thankful for each other is growing faith. Faith in God is a good thing. A lot of people claim and talk about it. What professing Christian would be ignorant or unconcerned about faith? Probably there are quite a few according to the latest surveys by groups like George Barna.

There is an important aspect about faith mentioned in this text. Genuine faith is growing faith. Faith is not a matter of believing in something. You could actually have faith in your ability to believe in faith. The object of faith must be God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Can you trust the Triune God? Can you depend on Him? What about God do you trust? That question brings up a very important principle: Faith trusts what God has said about Himself, what He promises, what He says about us. Faith stands upon, is focused on what God teaches us in His Word. The more you know about the Bible, the stronger your faith should be. Both the knowledge of God and trust in what God has revealed must be growing continually until we die.

The second trait of our brothers and sisters for which we should be thankful is increasing love. Expressions of love flow out of our understanding of God's love. When we understand God's love, we come to realize that love originates with God. John taught us, *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10)*.

True, genuine love begins with God, not us. That love is manifested, demonstrated, taught by Jesus Christ. He taught the disciples, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love" (John 15:9)*. Therefore, our love for each other is the indication that we love Christ who loves us first. Jesus also taught the disciples and us, *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35)*. Increasing expressions of genuine love through sacrifice for others is a sign of being born again.

There is a fitting response to observing increasing faith and increasing love in each other. Paul put it like this, *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God (v.4a)*.

Wait. Does this text teach that boasting is fitting? The first word in this verse is *therefore* which calls us back to the previous statement. By that we conclude that boasting flows out of the evidence of genuine salvation in the growing faith and love. But it is not right to boast, is it? Didn't Paul himself write, "Love does not envy or boast" (1 Corinthians 13:4)?

Paul especially was careful not to boast in things flowing from human strength or accomplishments. For example, He wrote, *Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me (2 Corinthians 12:6)*. And yet that same letter (2 Corinthians) contains 23 references to boasting. The idea here is to speak proudly about something or someone in a good way. When Paul spoke proudly of people, it was in reference to the work God does in them and through them. It is really speaking about how happy we are that God is causing faith and love to increase in others.

The opening greeting closes by listing good reason for boasting. *For your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring (v.4b)*. The people continued to face the harsh reality of persecution. But in the face of that persecution, they did not abandon faith in Christ, they did not back down from their testimony, they did not become fearful and faithless. In the face of trials, our faith must be steadfast (patient endurance). In the face of trials, our faith should be growing. Sure there will be times when we struggle and waver and feel like giving up. That is when our brother or sister comes alongside and encourages us.

The simple truths of this greeting and introduction are well known by real Christians. But we need to hear them again and again. We grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as we are reminded of the grace and peace that comes through Him. And growing in that knowledge, we grow in faith toward Him and love toward others—like He would do. What a joy it is to be part of our Lord's amazing Church building work.