

*1 Thessalonians 1:1-2*

v1

*Paul and Silvanus and Timothy*

Most of us are familiar with the story about Paul and his traveling companions—how Barnabas traveled with him on the first missionary journey, but subsequently they had a parting of the ways because of a dispute over the reliability of John-Mark. So on the second journey Paul took with him Silas (or Silvanus).

**Sidebar:** In Acts, Luke consistently refers to him as Silas (Jewish name), whereas Paul always refers to him as Silvanus (Roman transliteration of Silas)

There were others along on this trip, but they were not always together. [\[refer to handout\]](#) Let's briefly trace their time in Macedonia, then Achaia.

Why bother? What does this have to do with gleaned doctrine and counsel and theology from Paul's letters? Because we need to put those teachings in proper context, and we also need to remind ourselves that these were not plastic saints but flesh and blood men. We need to see them as more—and less—than mere words on a page. The more we understand their humanity, their trials, the easier it is to recognize and give credit to the Spirit of God at work in their lives. So let us humanize these men by spending just a moment looking at their itinerary and movement. This will also inform our understanding of some of the passages in the letters to the Thessalonians.

**Sidebar:** Invariably when it comes to chronologies, and who was where when, and with whom, opinions vary—even among respected scholars. So one can seldom be dogmatic about such things.

- Paul and Silvanus pick up Timothy in Lystra, and Luke (presumably) joins them in Troas.
- The three are together in Philippi, Thessalonica (probably), and Berea.
- While Silvanus and Timothy remain in Berea, Paul continues on to Athens alone.
- While there, Paul is very lonely, and eventually Silvanus and Timothy join him there. But then Paul sends Silvanus back to Philippi, Timothy back to Thessalonica, and Paul continues on to Corinth, where he meets Priscilla and Aquila.
- While Paul is in Corinth, Timothy and Silvanus eventually return to him—Timothy with news from Thessalonica—and Paul writes the two Thessalonian letters.

So now these three men are back together, in Corinth, and Paul eagerly responds in two letters to the information Timothy has brought him—probably dictating the letters to an amanuensis.

**Read 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18.**

As v2:2 makes clear, Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians were getting spurious counsel from counterfeit correspondence, made to look as if from him.

## Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2.

So here, at the close of his letter, he takes the stylus in hand and appends a closing benediction in his own hand—not just making it more personal, but using his handwriting as a stamp of authenticity against any pretenders.

[Back to the first letter.](#)

## THE RECIPIENT OF THE LETTER

We need no better evidence than v1 that the “church” is the people, and not the building.

### Read v1.

Paul wrote this letter “to the church.” Now, call me silly, but I don’t think one corresponds with a building—one corresponds with the people *in* the building.

**church** = *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see'-ah) = from a compound of <G1537> (ek) and a derivative of <G2564> (kaleo); **a calling out, i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting**, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both) :- assembly, church.

Paul was writing to “the called-out ones” in Thessalonica. As today, this has a double meaning:

- The assembly of believers is called out from the community at large; we are, in varying degrees, separated from those who do *not* believe.
- But this also has reference to our being “called,” or chosen, by God, as Paul mentions at the end of v4:  
**knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;**

This church was called out *from* something—and called out *to* something: this assembly of believers was called out from the world, and called out to Christ.

This verse reminds me of the time I committed one entire class session to the one, two-letter word “in”—as in, “in Christ.” Don’t worry; I’ll not subject you to that this time. But do note that this church is *in* “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These two letters—the greeting is essentially the same in both letters—are addressed not to the Rotary Club, not to a rugby team, and not to the local Jewish synagogue, but to those justified and sanctified by the blood of Christ Jesus. They are *in* Christ, and by associating the Son with the Father, Paul is emphasizing the *deity* of Christ Jesus.

**Sidebar:** Robert L. Thomas points out that the reading in the KJVs of “Grace to you and peace *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” does “find support in a few strong MSS, but the shorter version finds stronger support geographically and chronologically among the witnesses, [so] is therefore preferred.” The KJVs essentially tack on to v1 of the first letter v2 of the second letter.

Now that he has designated and defined the letters' recipients, Paul offers them his standard greeting: "Grace to you and peace." For the apostle Paul, the standard *chairō* (translated "Greetings" in James 1:1) is not good enough. His greeting must emphasize the grace we enjoy in Christ, so he uses *charis*. And of course, it is this very *charis* that affords the Thessalonians, and us, the privilege of being *in* "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

v2

As Alex mentioned last week, one of the pleasures of studying the letters to the Thessalonian church is that they were in pretty good shape. Rather than taking our lessons from all the mistakes they were making, we can learn from what they were doing right.

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2.**

Verse 2 represents Paul's boilerplate expression of thanksgiving—not to suggest it was insincere; just standard. In fact, one way we know it was *not* insincere is the exception to the rule. When a church, such as the believers in Galatia, was not living in a way for which the apostle could give thanks, he didn't say it.

To the Galatians he greets them with his name, he mentions Jesus Christ and God the Father, he greets them with grace and peace—but there is no thanksgiving. In its place is v6 in the Galatian letter.

**I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (Galatians 1:6)**

No boilerplate thanksgiving there; instead, he took them to the woodshed.

So we can easily believe that when Paul said he was grateful for the believers in Thessalonica, he really meant it. And he did this repeatedly, often, at every opportunity.

### *making mention of you in our prayers*

Let's close, today, on this last phrase in v2. I confess there are times when I feel the urge to pray, but don't know what to say. Perhaps the situation on my heart is so frustrating or confusing from an earthly perspective, that I just don't know how to put it into words. Or maybe my spirit is lethargic, or weary, and I just can't properly organize my thoughts.

Here we have Paul describing the content of *his* prayers: He gives thanks *to God* for these brothers and sisters in Christ, but he doesn't stop there. He begins to flesh this out by stating that he "mak[es] mention" of them to the Father.

Here is a word that means less in today's vernacular than it did in the first century.

**mention** = *mneia* (mnay'-ah) = from <G3415> (mnaomai) or <G3403> (mimnesko); **recollection**; by implication **recital** : - mention, **remembrance**.

As Paul uses it, there is a bi-directional aspect to this word.

### *Backwards*

In one direction, he brings to his mind and offers up to the Father his recollections of the Thessalonians—their progress in faith, their joys and sorrows, what they mean to him personally. Here are the thoughts that reinforce the intimacy between brothers and sisters in the Lord.

This word is from the same Greek stem as the word we use every month during communion: "Do this is **remembrance** of Me" (Luke 22:19). Jesus instituted this ordinance or sacrament of communion, first, that we would recall and solemnly celebrate His sacrificial act for our salvation. As we partake of the bread and the wine our thoughts are to be on Jesus, and what He did for us by willingly receiving in our stead the lash, the spikes, the agony of death on the cross.

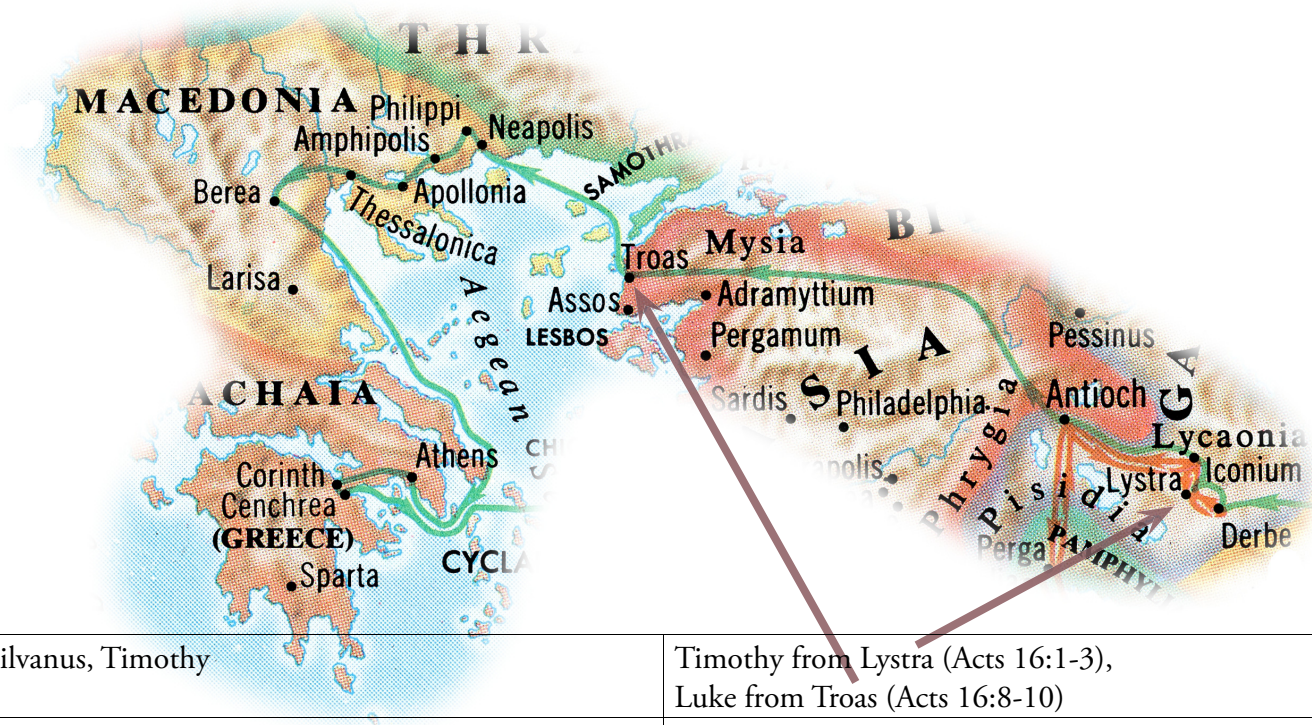
Just so, in our prayers we are to remember—to the Lord, but *for* us—the lives and situations of those brothers and sisters He has placed on our heart.

### *Forwards*

But there is also an intercessory component to this "mentioning." Paul is not just praying *about* the Thessalonians, but praying *for* them—for their advancement in the gospel, the development and maturing of their walk of faith, which he expands on in the following verses.

Our own prayers should be forward-looking, calling upon the Lord to work mightily in our brothers and sisters for the furtherance of their sanctification, for their maturing in Christ.

# ITINERARY & MOVEMENT



In Philippi	Paul, Silvanus, Timothy	Timothy from Lystra (Acts 16:1-3), Luke from Troas (Acts 16:8-10)
In Thessalonica	Paul, Silvanus, Timothy?	
In Berea	Paul, Silvanus, Timothy	
to Athens	Paul	Silvanus and Timothy remain in Berea (Acts 17:14)
In Athens	Paul	Silvanus and Timothy arrive later (Acts 17:16)
From Athens	Silvanus sent back to Philippi (probably), and Timothy sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2)	
In Corinth	Paul, with Priscilla and Aquila	Silas and Timothy arrive later (Acts 18:5); after Timothy returns with news from Thessalonica, Paul writes the two Thessalonian letters. (1 Thessalonians 3:6)