

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4**PREFACE**

The evidence from the account in Acts is that the apostle Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonian church just shortly after writing the first—perhaps within a few months, and also from Corinth, from where he had written the first.

The evidence cited is that there is no mention of Silvanus (Silas) or Timothy being with Paul after they joined him in Corinth from Macedonia (Acts 18:5). So if they are still with him (1:1), he must have written this second letter, as the first, while still in Corinth, where he was for about a year and a half.

As with most of his letters, we can deduce from its content the *reasons* for this second letter:

- their persecution had worsened;
- spurious documents and teachings, falsely ascribed to Paul, were circulating bad information about the end times;
- and some of the Thessalonians, thinking the return of Christ was imminent, had adopted some bad habits regarding work.

This second letter has a slightly harsher tone to it, perhaps some impatience, and certainly sterner counsel. The reasons for the letter aside, I think this is natural in human correspondence. Our first letter to a new friend or associate may be more formal, more gracious, with subsequent letters getting to the point more quickly, with succinct, un-flowery prose. All of these result in a shorter, more direct letter—one, while not ungracious or unloving, has, in some passages, the tone of a stern and frowning pastor or human father.

w1-2

Paul's greeting is identical to his greeting in the first letter—save for one word and a repetition.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2.

Question: Which word did he change in v1? (answer: "God *the* Father" to "God *our* Father")

This is not a dramatic change from the first letter—and the second "our" in v2 of some translations is on shakier ground textually—but the insertion of "our" does serve to emphasize the dramatic theological point made by Jesus Himself, that in Him God is not just His Father, not just the "Father" of the nation Israel (Deuteronomy 32:6), but every believer's Father (Matthew 5:16).

v3

Verse 3, at least for me, is an instructive example of the value in not always trusting your first interpretation of a passage.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

Initially, in my workbook, I circled the word “ought” and made a note off to the side: “ ‘ought?’ don’t they?” That is, the way I first read this word was that Paul was saying that they “really *should be* giving thanks to God for them,” implying that they were perhaps derelict in this. But that’s not what he is saying.

We ought, We are bound^{kjvs} = *opheilomen* = or (in certain tenses) its prolonged form *opheileo*, of-i-leh'-o; probably from the base of <G3786> (*ophelos*) (through the idea of accruing); **to owe** (pecuniarily); figurative **to be under obligation** (ought, must, should); morally to fail in duty :- behave, be bound, (be) debt (-or), (be) due (-ty), be guilty (indebted), (must) need (-s), ought, owe, should. See also <G3785> (*ophelon*).

Paul here ([and nowhere else, save for v2:13](#)) declares that he and Silvanus and Timothy are *under personal obligation* to give thanks to God for the Thessalonians, and he follows this with, “as is only fitting” (NIV: “rightly so”). Behind this is a larger issue; Paul was not just commending the church in Thessalonica (which he does in the remainder of this verse) but is expressing his personal debt of thanksgiving to Christ for his (Paul’s) salvation.

And here is a valuable lesson for us. One of Paul’s better qualities was that he never forgot, and repeatedly gave thanks for, what Christ had done—not just for those in the churches he began, but for him. If we lift this out of the immediate context—he gives thanks for the Thessalonian’s maturing, deepening faith during persecution—it is a reminder to each of us to continually express to God our gratitude for what Christ has done for us. We hear this more specifically in Paul’s second use of this word translated “ought” or “bound to” in the second chapter.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

Every day, in one form or another, we should look up and declare, “My God, thank you for saving me!” More than that, our lives should be dedicated to His service—not to repay what He has done, for that would be impossible, but out of gratitude and adoration for His mercy and grace. Out of His grace He saved us, and out of that same grace He apportioned to every one of us certain gifts to equip us for service to Him and His church. It is “only fitting.”

Faith

because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

In his first letter to them, Paul first commends them for their faith and their “labor of love”—

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,
(1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

—but in Chapter Three he suggests there is still room for improvement:
as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? (1 Thessalonians 3:10)

Here at the beginning of his second letter we seem to have evidence that there had indeed, in just a few months, been marked improvement in *both* areas of faith and love. He gives thanks that their “faith is greatly enlarged”—

greatly enlarged^{nasb}, **grows exceedingly**^{kjvs}, **growing more and more**^{niv}, **growing abundantly**^{esv} = *hyperauxanō* = from <G5228> (huper) and <G837> (auxano); **to increase above ordinary degree** :- grow exceedingly.

—and their (agape) love for one another “grows ever greater.”

grows ever greater^{nasb}, **abounds**^{kjvs}, **increasing**^{niv, esv} = *pleonazo* = from <G4119> (pleion); to do, **make or be more**, i.e. increase (transitive or intransitive); by extension to **superabound** :- abound, abundant, make to increase, have over.

Even with the problems they were having that are addressed by Paul in this letter, this was a church on the rise. As we learned from the first letter, the apostle was pleasantly astonished that they immediately set out to spread the gospel through the Macedonian region. Now he commends them for their deepening faith and love toward each other.

This is no accident; these two—faith and love—are not disassociate qualities of a church. **Turn to Galatians 5**. The Galatian church was struggling against some Judaizers—or legalizers—Jewish Christians who wanted to impose some of the requirements of the Jewish Law, such as circumcision, on followers of Christ. And in one of his arguments against this encroachment on the freedom believers have in Christ, Paul points out to the Galatians what is *really* important.

Read Galatians 5:4-6.

“Faith working through love,” or, as the NIV has it, “faith expressing itself through love.” That is, our love—for each other, for our neighbor, for the unsaved—is the *outflow* of our faith. The word translated “working” is *energeo*, which means to be active, to be at work. Love is faith *at work*; it is the expression of our faith. So it only follows that as our faith increases, as it grows and matures and deepens, so will our love, because both are based in our relationship with Christ Jesus. Notice how Paul associates faith and love in two other passages. To the Ephesians he signed off with

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 6:23; emphasis added)

and to Titus he wrote

All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. (Titus 3:15; emphasis added)

So, back in v3 of our Thessalonian text, it follows that as their “faith is greatly enlarged” the “love of each one of [them] toward one another [would] grow ever greater.” Love follows faith. The deeper our faith in Christ, the greater our love for each other.

v4

At the beginning of his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul remarks, almost with amazement, that the church already has a favorable reputation throughout the Macedonian region and beyond.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8.

In the first letter he says that “we need not say anything.” In the second letter, however, he goes out of his way to announce that “we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches.”

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4.

The “therefore” (or KJVs’ “so”) tells us that his “boasting” is based on their growing, maturing faith and love. And while the first part of v4 may sound to our ears a bit tinny, even out of character for the apostle—he is “speaking proudly,” “boasting” about, even “glorying” in a church he recently planted—he will do it again.

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, in an effort to improve their grace and giving, we have an example of what he speaks of in our text, using the Thessalonians as a positive example.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-2.

But he also boasted in the opposite direction—using the Corinthian church as a positive example to the Macedonian churches, which would include Thessalonica.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-2.

So while on the surface of v4 this pride or boasting may appear a little unseemly, two points are in order:

- Paul’s motives are pure. His purpose is to encourage all the churches to righteous, Christ-honoring behavior. To that end he will occasionally cite the example of another church—either as a positive or negative goad.
- He has just said that he gives “thanks *to God*” for what the Thessalonians have accomplished in their walk. That is, he directs his thanksgiving and praise upward *to God* for what He—the Lord—has accomplished in their midst. I don’t think his attitude about this would change between v3 and v4. He may sing the praise of this church or that to encourage another church, but he does not lose sight of where the real praise should go.

All of this is about the Thessalonians’ perseverance, or steadfastness of faith, through “persecutions and afflictions.”

persecutions = *diogmos* = to chase, to pursue

afflictions = *thlipsis* = from <G2346> (thlibo); **pressure** (literal or figurative) :- afflicted (-tion), **anguish**, burdened, persecution, **tribulation**, trouble, **distress**.

That is, the first word describes what has been happening to them, while the second describes the effect it has had on them. And through it all, their faith, along with their love for each other, has actually *grown*.

No matter what issues Paul later addresses in this letter regarding any deficiencies on their part, the church in Thessalonica is one we, too, can look to as an example of remarkable endurance and faith through trials.