1 Thessalonians 1:1- 1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. NASU

A. Paul and Silvanus and Timothy - It is notable that Paul does not identify himself as an Apostle in his greeting in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Typically Paul’s greeting includes a reference to his position as an Apostle.

1 Corinthians 1:1 - 1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, NASB

Galatians 1:1 - 1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), NASB

Ephesians 1:1 - 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: NASB

It appears that his status as an Apostle was not in question by this church, or even in this entire region where Paul had established so many churches. Additionally, he adds the names of Silvanus and Timothy, his travelling companions on his second missionary journey and fellow laborers in the Gospel. Silas, likely a Hellenistic Jew (note the Greek name Silvanus), was a prominent member in the early church establishing churches with Paul in the Gentile world and later acting as a scribe for Peter as is stated in 1 Peter 5:12. Timothy was Paul’s “son in the faith” and faithful companion and worker through much of Paul’s Apostolic ministry. Timothy worked tirelessly in the ministry as pastor, evangelist and missionary. He is the subject of Paul’s Pastoral Letters 1 & 2 Timothy. Even though both Silas and Timothy are included in the greeting, this is simply a consolation of grace on Paul’s part to include them as they were fellow workers with him in the church’s conversion and ongoing health. This was a frequent practice by Paul, who’s authorship of the Thessalonians letters is rarely questioned noting the use of the personal pronoun “I” in 2:18, 3:5, 5:27. Paul the Apostle is the author of both 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

B. To the church of the Thessalonians – Paul’s inclusion of the word “church” is the common word for gathered Christians which is the English translation of the word “ekklesia” meaning “the called out ones” or “the chosen ones.” No doubt this remarkably healthy church is among the true elect people of God as is evidenced by their fruitful life and Paul’s statement in verse 4.

1 Thessalonians 1:4 - 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you: NASU

Now Thessalonica was no small city but was in fact the capitol city in the entire province of Macedonia. Therefore God’s establishment of such a prominent and healthy church here, in spite of strong Satanic opposition, was a very strategic matter in regards to the evangelization of this region of the Roman World. William Burkitt comments; “Thessalonica was the metropolis, or mother city of Macedonia, where a Christian church was planted by the ministry of St. Paul and Silas, but with great opposition from the Jews, who forced Paul to fly to Berea for his own safety, Acts 17, and Jason, with others that entertained him, had like to have been sacrificed in their own houses; yet there, in despite of the devil's rage, and persecutor's malice, doth God erect a glorious church, a Christian church, in honor of his son, who purchased it with his blood.” Wouldn’t it be something if we could see ourselves as such a strategic and fruitful ministry in our region of the world and point in history as this glorious Thessalonian church.

C. in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – It is a marvelous truth to understand the relation that we now have with God through Christ. Just like the greeting in 2 Thessalonians Paul states that the church is “in God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is no small statement but one which describes our union with God and also with Christ. We are “in” Him. That is, we participate in the very life of God because of the unique position we now hold because of our redemption by Christ. Having been sanctified by the blood of Christ in the atonement, we have now become the very dwelling place of God, who lives in us by the presence of His Holy Spirit. As Paul states elsewhere, we are the very “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19). But even
more than this we are said to be “in Christ” and He is said to be “in us.”

Galatians 2:20 - 20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. NASB

Colossians 3:3 - 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. NASB

This union with Christ and with the Father is great mystery of what it means to be a Christian. In fact all three members of the Godhead are said to live in us and us in them as we share in and experience the divine and eternal life of God Himself. Consider the wonderful and powerful love and affection for God and Christ that wells up within our hearts. What amazing love is this that dominates our soul with such strong affection? It is in fact the experience of the very life of God within our souls which comes from our union with Him! We are in Christ and He is in us! This wonderful Union with Christ is seen in many places in the NT, here are just a few.

(Rom 8:1-2, 39, 2 Cor 5:17, Eph 1:3-4, 2:10, Col 1:27, Phil 4:19, 1 Thess 4:14, 16, 2 Tim 2:10, 1 Peter 5:10)

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 - 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 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, NASU

A. We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; - Here we begin to see Paul’s great affection for the church and his commendation of God’s great work in the hearts. Inherent in his thanksgiving is a recognition that God is the One who is responsible for their great “faith, hope and love.” Thus he is not commending men, but thanking God. For what good virtue do any of us Christians have except that which has been a gift of God’s gracious hand, as Calvin writes here…. “Hence instead of congratulations, he makes use of thanksgivings, that he may put them in mind, that everything in them that he declares to be worthy of praise, is a kindness from God.” And not only is Paul grateful, but “Silas and Timothy” as well, he says “we give thanks to God.” But notice here they give thanks “always” and also for “all of you.” Not only are they thankful to God for the amazing testimony of this young church, but have in mind a constant offering of thanksgiving to God for each and every one of the Thessalonian believers. Their love for them is a sincere and genuine love for the people themselves. It is this love for them that drives them to pray for the church as they are “making mention of you in our prayers.” Notice here the heart of devoted thanksgiving and prayer of a devout and dedicated Christian leader for God’s people.

B. constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love – As Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians he is “constantly bearing in mind” the great things God is doing among them. And this is no small thing for the Apostle here speaks of the great wonder of Christian life. It is a “faith” that works, a “love” that labors, and a “hope” that is steadfast. When he refers to their “work of faith” he is undoubtedly speaks of the fruit that their faith produces, not in any way to be misconstrued as faith being some kind of work. The Greek word itself for faith is the word pistis which refers to a “strong moral conviction, assurance, belief and/or fidelity.” Elsewhere in Paul’s teaching he makes it very clear that salvation comes by faith alone, the great doctrine of sola fide, and is “apart from any works,” that is, salvation cannot be earned but is the “free gift” of God’s grace received through faith.

Romans 3:20-24 - 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

Galatians 2:16 - 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith

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in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. NASB

Therefore this “work of faith” is the work that their faith produces. That is the glorious worship of God that is now being manifested in and by them, who have repented from those vile sins of pagan idolatry and “turned to God from idols,” v-9, “to serve a living and true God.” This “work of faith” then is the obedience and service to God that Christian faith produces in those who are “in Christ.” And this he also identifies as a “labor of love.” For what is it that drives a Christian to serve and obey God except their great love for Him and for Christ in response to the wonderful things He has accomplished on their behalf. Christian life is a constant labor, but it is a labor that is motivated by tremendous love, both love for God and our neighbor. Indeed did our Lord tell us that the entire Old Testament was summed up in these two commandments;

Matthew 22:36-40 - 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." NASB

It is this working faith and laboring love of the Thessalonian Christians that Paul is so thankful for. Indeed it is the evidence of God’s calling them out of the darkness of the world into His glorious Church. Concerning Paul’s esteem of these Christian Calvin notes…… “And unquestionably, the more that one excels in piety and other excellences, so much the more we ought to hold him in regard and esteem. For what is more worthy of love than God? Hence there is nothing that should tend more to excite our love to individuals, than when the Lord manifests Himself in them by the gifts of His Spirit.” In other words, the more we become like Christ through faith, the more worthy of high esteem we become, having taken on the very character and nature of God. Christian virtue is a glorious thing, it is our pursuit and the longing of our hearts to be like Christ! It is this piety or virtue that we “work” and “labor” to possess and to manifest, and this to the glory and honor of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Notice then, that Christian “faith” produces “work” that is also described as “labor.” This work is NOT what brings salvation to us, but is the product or fruit of the life of one who is saved. True saving faith produces works that verify to reality of salvation as this is one of the great purposes for which we were saved so that God may be glorified in our service and obedience to Him. This is very clear in the teaching of the Apostles.

Ephesians 2:8-10 - 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. NASB

1 Peter 4:8-11 - 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. NASB

C. and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father – Christian faith and love are not complete in and of themselves if not accompanied with hope. Here notice the “steadfastness” that the Thessalonians possess as a result of the hope in the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. How else can a Christian persevere in this dark world apart from the knowing that there will come a day when evil will no longer prevail, but will be destroyed and removed from God’s creation. To this we eagerly look that we might be united to the Father and His Son, in His glorious Kingdom we there will never again be hurt and pain, tragedy or loss, and evil will never again show its ugly face forever and ever, world without end.

Revelation 21:1-5 - 1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth

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