

Light Brings Salt

Volume 4, Issue 41

October 29, 2006



Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



A Church Worthy of Commendation

Pastor John Griffith

The Paul goes to great lengths to commend the Thessalonians by expressing his gratitude to God for these believers, a church that he would later (1:6-7) would refer to as an example, a tupos church.

There are three participles in the Greek text that draw our attention to what Paul and his associates were focused on as they expressed their gratitude to the Lord.

Some translations (NASB, KJV, etc.) show these participles by using words ending in ‘ing’—“**making** mention ... constantly **bearing** in mind ... **knowing** ... His choice.” (1:3).

To reflect this construction in the breakdown of this section as it pertains to the prayers of the missionary team is as follows: (a) the **means** of giving thanks—through praying; vs:2 (b) the **occasion** for giving thanks — remembering your work of faith ... ; vs:3 (c) the **cause** for giving thanks—living out their call from God.

In nearly all of Paul’s epistles, he begins by giving thanks for his readers with Galatians being the only exception.

Undoubtedly this was because of his deep disappointment over the works mentality (legalism) that had developed in the Galatian church.

But there was no disappointment over the Thessalonians.

In fact, they had become an example (1:7) so the missionaries continued to give thanks to God for the ministry of these believers.

Occasionally over the years, I’ve been asked about how to find a good church, preferably, a good Bible teaching church. While I offer some suggestions of things to look for, I always remind people that there are no perfect churches. You may have heard the humorous comment that if you find a church you think is perfect, don’t join it. Why? Because you’d ruin it. But some churches are a lot closer to the ideal and the church of the Thessalonians, though not perfect, was such a church.

By way of application, what can we learn from Paul’s and his associates’ thankfulness for these believers?

- (1) It demonstrates the grace perspective about anyone’s ministry and productive results. That God is the source of spiritual increase (1 Cor. 3:3-10).
- (2) Though Paul was quick to give God credit and thank God for a fruitful ministry or change in the lives of others, he never lost sight of his personal responsibility to sow, to water, or pray, teach, and admonish (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-11; Col. 1:28–2:2). Here is a wonderful illustration of the balance between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.
- (3) It provides insight into the kind of people we ought to be—thankful, faithful, and dependent workers.
- (4) We not only see the thankfulness of their prayers, but also their consistency of their prayers. The emphasis on the consistent nature of their prayer life and thanksgiving seen in verses 2 and 3 is brought out by: three continuous present tenses (MV giving thanks, ptc. making mention, and ptc. bearing in

mind), as along with the adverb “always” (vs. 2), and the added “constantly” (vs. 3).

- (5) Realizing their own inadequacy in ministry, they regularly turned to the only one who is sufficient (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5-6).
- (6) Paul’s thankfulness and prayers for others were personal and specific. “*Making mention*” does not suggest just a casual remembrance. “*Mention*” is μενεία and refers to “a remembrance in a special case, i.e., ‘the direction of the memory to some particular object.’” Therefore its specific needs, specific people.
- (7) The Apostle was thankful for “all” of these believers. He was not just being polite. He was genuinely thankful for what God had done in each of their lives. This demonstrates the importance of every believer in the body of Christ.
- (8) What prompted Paul's thankfulness was not just their positive volition to BD but their tenacious attitude towards the Word and its application in their lives, living it out in the face of great adversity.

The Occasion for Giving Thanks — What Paul Remembered (vs. 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, (NASV)

The occasion for giving thanks was their remembering the life-changing character that had occurred in these believers, which had such an impact in the community. This is described by the participle, μνημονεύοντες, “remembering,” which introduces verse 3. But where does “without ceasing” or “continually,” the adverb (αδιάλειπτως) go?

Does it go with the preceding clause, “making mention” or with the clause that follows, “remembering”? [With some texts it’s the last word of vs:2 while others it’s the first word of vs:3.]

The character of the Thessalonians and the concern of the missionaries for these believers brought them regularly to mind when they went to

the throne of grace to pray. While verse 3 focuses our attention on three specific areas of remembrance, the whole chapter really amplifies the character of this church **as remembered** by the missionary team.

Looking at the specifics mentioned in verse 3, we should note that the substance of what they remembered is found in three words: **work, labor, and endurance**. However, Paul was quick to add three more words which were vital to these three active nouns. To each was added one of the great words of the Christian triad — **faith, love, and hope**.

What we have is the character of Christ manifested in their life; these qualities are each the fruit of the Spirit and the Word — the product of walking by the Spirit. These qualities of *faith, love, and hope* are absolutely essential if one’s work, labor, and endurance are to result in genuine fruitfulness.

The Lord’s rebuke to the church of Ephesus provides a stern warning regarding our Christian service or ministry. In Revelation 2:2, Christ told the church, “*I know your deeds (works) and your toil (labor) and perseverance (endurance),*” but there was something missing and they experienced His rebuke. The church of Ephesus had works, labor, and endurance, but there is no mention of the faith, the love, and the hope as Paul notes here at Thessalonica as the source of their Christian activity.

These three prepositional phrases are what are called **subjective genitives** grammatically and stand to the word they modify **as root to fruit**. They point to *a work produced by faith, a labor motivated by love, and an endurance prompted by hope*. But, as Scripture makes abundantly clear, each is in turn the result of the ministry of the Spirit of God and the Word of God being lived out in the life of believers.

Their Work of Faith (*work produced by faith*)

“*Work*” is the Greek εργον, which refers to “what is done or made, a work, a deed, action, or an accomplishment.” It is “work” (singular) that faith inspires to accomplish the will of God. Since your is plural and work is singular it looks at the

collective accomplishment of the church as it functioned in the midst of great persecution.

“Faith” is πιστις, which speaks of what is believed; Our life is to be characterized by faith. We are saved by faith and we are to live and walk by faith (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 1:17; 2 Cor. 5:7). Of course, the key element of faith is the object of faith. Here the focus is on the Word they had been taught and believed. This would have included some basic understanding of who God is and the provision made by Him for them.

Also believe that Paul would have introduced them to the important identification truths that detailed their position in Christ and its importance in their daily lives. So they had some elemental content, remember they had not a whole lot of teaching before Paul and Silas were run out of town.

What made the difference for them?? They believed it and lived it. They used the **Word known** in their decision making process. Do we??

Their Labor of Love (*Labor motivated by love!*)

“Labor” is the Greek κοπος, which refers to “laborious toil; exhaustive, arduous labor; the kind that causes sweat and fatigue. Great contrast between work and labor, work may be pleasant and stimulating but labor involves arduous toil that strenuous and sweat producing. The labor motivated by love is a present labor and is explained in verse 1:9c, the sphere of their labor was “to serve a living and true God.” Out of a deep love for the Lord and His people, the work of faith extended itself into a toil even to the point of weariness in the service of God and those He wanted them to minister to.

Remember: Definition of love. Love is an attitude that motivates us to do what is right or just in the light of the Word of God no matter what the cost.

Paul provided an excellent model for such labor to the point of weariness (see **1 Ths. 2:2,9; 2 Ths. 3:8; and Col. 1:29–2:2**).

The Steadfastness of Hope

(Endurance prompted by hope)

“steadfastness” is the Greek ὑπομονη from hupo, “under” and meno “to remain.” The idea is to remain under the pressure regardless of the intensity or length of time. So it means “endurance, patience, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance.” This is not just an endurance of resignation, gutting it out but one that is stimulated by hope.

The “steadfastness of hope” is a present endurance prompted by a future prospect, a hope indicated in verse 10, “to wait for His Son from heaven.” This “hope” ελπις speaks of hope in the sense of expectant confidence. The reason that there is no uncertainty with this hope is related to the object of the hope or the foundation of the hope.

One of the best commentaries on this quality of endurance prompted by hope is spelled out for us by Paul in 2 Cor. 4:14-18. This a context where Paul has recounted his endurance in the extreme pressures of his ministry for the gospel, he shows us how endurance is prompted by having an eternal focus.

Here in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 the object of their hope is expressed by the words, “in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.” This points to the anchor and foundation of their hope, and ours. It was for them and is for us a living hope based on a living Savior and His exalted presence before the Father through resurrection and ascension to God’s right hand in heaven.

From that exalted place He will return for us, His people. This phrase, “in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father” is also linked grammatically to the 2 previous statements, work *produced by faith, a labor motivated by love also.*

What this does is to link the **faith, love and hope** spoken of here all to Jesus Christ and therefore to our relationship with Him.