

# Encourage Each Other With These Words: An Overview of 1 Thessalonians & an Exegesis of Chapter One

By Joel S. Heckendorf

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*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

## Encourage each other with these words.

How many times haven't we used these final words of First Thessalonians chapter four? Perhaps you've used them as personal motivation as you're driving to the hospital, still trying to get the sleep out of your eyes and wet down your bedhead. You then use them as a closing thought as you stand by the widow who mourns over the body of her husband, clutching his now less than warm hand. You use them as a resounding "Amen" when your listeners' eyes are pasted to the casket spray of roses in front of you and their tears are magnifying that ribbon that says, "Beloved Husband" or "Dad."

Why? Why *these words*? Could it be that *these words* simply put to print what we hope and pray our pastoral hearts can convey? Could it be that *these words* express in a far better manner what we hope to do without sounding too much like a cliché, namely, they take us to the end of the world and remind God's children that everything will be okay in the end. Could it be that *these words*, perhaps only second to the great resurrection chapter of the Bible, demonstrate the victory of our Savior over death as we hear the trumpet sound?

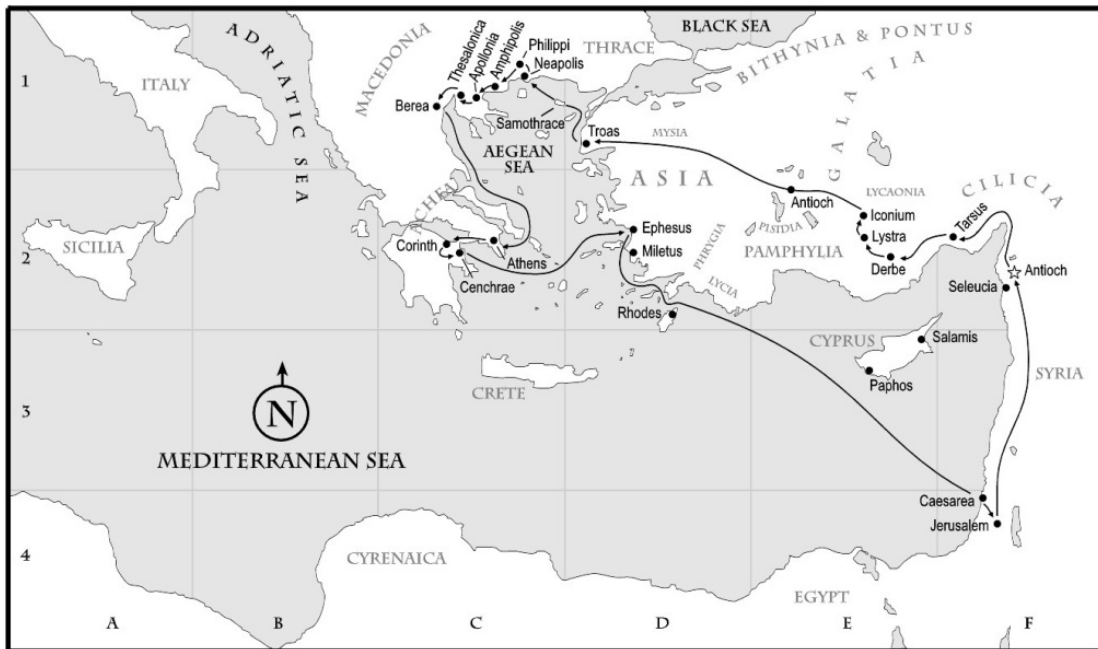
*These words* certainly are beautiful and comforting in and of themselves. But a closer look at the whole of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians demonstrates that *these words* were not just a few drops of golden honey that accidentally dripped into an otherwise dry, tasteless sermon. They aren't the surprising nugget of chocolate-chip cookie dough in an otherwise vanilla letter. Rather, they are a sampling of a whole jug of sweet, gospel honey. They are one morsel of a whole batch of chocolate-chip pastoral heartedness that only you and I can hope to display for the saints entrusted to our care.

Perhaps it was my personal memory lapse or my failure to marry the Scriptures as much as I ought, but if you were to ask me whom Paul's "favorites" were, I never would have placed the Christians of Thessalonica in the discussion. The Philippians... yes. Who could forget the joy that they sparked in Paul's pen? The Ephesians... yes. Who could forget the tears that Paul shed with the elders on the seashore? The Bereans... yes. Who wouldn't want a bunch of Bible-thumping members who challenged, "Let me first check out what you said with Scriptures." But the Thessalonians? Aren't they just a bunch of cloud-gazing, lazy people hoping Jesus will return so they don't have to get their hands dirty?

While they had their faults, a renewed look at the Thessalonian brothers<sup>1</sup> has given me a new found love and respect for this group of Christians living along one of the major trade routes connecting the Roman West to the Byzantium East. One would think that location itself would have made Thessalonica a prime target for mission work, especially for a missionary like Paul. It was the hub of culture and commerce, boasting the largest population of Macedonia<sup>2</sup>, not to mention that it had a Jewish base to serve as a starting point. Yet, Thessalonica never showed up as a “hot spot” on Paul’s DMB reports. In fact, he seems to come to Thessalonica by accident more than by design.

## Background

You will recall that Thessalonica was a city that Paul reached on his second missionary tour, or what I like to refer to as the “De-Tour”. After Paul had touched base with his first mission trip congregations of Galatia, he had every intent of heading north to Bithynia. But the Holy Spirit closed that door. Then, as he often does, the Holy Spirit opened a mission window of opportunity for Paul & Company in Macedonia.<sup>3</sup>



After an eventful stay in Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled 100 miles southwest, making Thessalonica major stop number two of the Macedonian leg. “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”<sup>4</sup> But when jealous Jews rioted and invaded Jason’s home, what had all the makings of a long missionary stay was cut short.<sup>5</sup> Paul, Silas and Timothy proceeded to

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the significant size of the word “brothers” on the *wordle* (To learn more about *wordle* or to create your own, go to [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net)) that graces this paper’s cover is a lesson as to the love the apostle had for the Thessalonians. Seventeen times in this short letter, Paul uses this term of endearment.

<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that at the time, Thessalonica had about 200,000 people. Today, sometimes also called Salonica, Thessalonica is Greece’s second largest city with about 350,000 people in the municipality and over 1 million in the metropolitan area.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 16:6-10.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 17:2

<sup>5</sup> At first reading, it may seem that Paul was only in Thessalonica for three weeks because of his preaching in the synagogue on three Sabbaths. However, the way in which he writes suggests that he was either: a) conducting ministry for a longer time, but only preached for three Sabbaths in the synagogue; or b) after the events of Acts 16 & 17, he returned for a longer period of time. The fact that Paul dealt with the Thessalonians as a “father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging them to live lives

Berea and eventually wound up in Corinth, which served as the return address on this, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. This letter is in response to Timothy's report, who recently returned from a dual-purpose trip to Thessalonica: 1) to build up the Thessalonians; and 2) to settle the nerves of "father" Paul.<sup>6</sup>

I can only imagine what it must have been like to evacuate a fledgling ministry. On a small scale, as I recall my prayers about my former church family, my prayers were not so much for the staunch leaders or life-long WELSers. I was confident that they had seen pastors come and go and were solid in their Christian maturity to know that it was the message and not the messenger that was the difference-maker. My prayers were for the newbies: the Will Woods of the world who took me out golfing the week before I left and had three crosses as his ball-marking, saying, "Pastor, I had no idea what this was before you shared it with me." I prayed for the people on the prospect list with whom a relationship had been developed, but BIC had not yet been realized. Fortunately, I was confident that the staunch saints left behind would carry on the work and follow up on the newbies.

But what happens when you leave a whole congregation of newbies? Perhaps some of our missionaries who had to be recalled from their fields for a variety of reasons can relate. It's one thing to be recalled for finances; it's a completely different thing to be pushed out because of persecution. For the missionary would know that threats that once were directed to him likely would be redirected to the people he left behind. Throw into that equation a pastor who incomparably poured his heart and soul into his people's lives, one begins to understand why Paul "could not stand it any longer"<sup>7</sup> when all was quiet on the Thessalonian front.

What would it be like for Paul as he waited for Timothy's report? If Paul weren't such a busybody, I could picture him as the father of the prodigal son, peering down the path for any sign of Timothy's return. While he may not have been physically in pause mode during Timothy's absence, reading between the lines of his letter gives strong indication that things were at least in slow-motion.

What would be your prayer for the Thessalonians? What were you hoping Timothy would find "up north"? Certainly, your hope would be for their safety and well-being. But more than that, your prayer would be the same you have for all those white-gowned teenagers that stand before you in spring. Your prayer is for them to be faithful, not to you, but to the Gospel which you preached and its ultimate Author; faithful to the point of death, so that even if you never see them again on this side of heaven, someday you could enjoy comparing your crowns of life.<sup>8</sup>

## Content

And it's that report that Timothy brought: the Thessalonians were faithful. More than that, they were models of faithfulness. As relief and joy poured into Paul's heart, it kept flowing through his hand. Basically, the first chapter is a thank-you note to God for the faithfulness displayed by the Thessalonians, not only to the Gospel but in their response to the Gospel.

But what about Paul? Just as he was agonizing over the faithfulness of the Thessalonians, is it possible they were wondering the same about him? Macedonian cities were filled with traveling salesmen peddling their beliefs. Once Paul high-tailed it out of town, how did they know he was a faithful spokesman of the living

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worthy of God," (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12) suggests there was a relationship built that would require a lengthier stay. Likewise, Paul thanks the Philippians for sending him aid "again and again" (Philippians 4:16) when he was in Thessalonica. In pre FedEx days, it would have seemed nearly impossible to receive multiple gift packages from a town 100 miles away within a 3-week span.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thessalonians 3:1

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps on a bit more selfish vein, one couldn't fault Paul if he was wondering if his Thessalonian tour was all for nothing, or "not a failure" (1 Thessalonians 2:1). Professor Dan Balge uses this "not a failure" phrase as the main point in the September 2011 issue of *Forward in Christ*.

God? Thus, to put their hearts at ease, Paul spends chapter two defending his apostleship and actions that led to his absence.<sup>9</sup>

Having established both the faithfulness of the Thessalonians and himself, Paul naturally goes on in almost Lutheresque fashion to explain, “What does this mean?” Faithfulness means persecution. We can expect it. Just as he had told the Galatian churches, “*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,*”<sup>10</sup> Paul repeats his faith-strengthening and soul-encouraging words to these brothers across the pond. If they murdered the Master, what will they do to his followers? And so Paul prays for their continued strength to endure, wishing he could be with them to help weather the storm.

Unfortunately, Paul can’t be with them at this time, so he seizes the last inches of his scroll to minister to them from afar, both as individuals and as a congregation. Knowing that few, if any of them, had his gift to remain single *and* chaste, Paul devotes space to encourage the Thessalonians in their sexual conduct. But then, as the last inch of the scroll is near, you can almost see the scribe’s handwriting becoming scrunched as he jots down one piece of Pauline advice after another. “Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. Test everything. Hold onto the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”<sup>11</sup> Sound too difficult? Don’t worry. “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”<sup>12</sup>

But why? Why ought the Thessalonians be faithful to the Gospel? Why ought the Thessalonians be faithful in their sanctified living? What difference does it make if “the one who called them was faithful?” Any Thessalonian would tell you, “Why?” is always followed by, “Z,” i.e., eventually, it all comes to the end, the end of the world.

The season of End Times was the favorite time of year for the Thessalonian worship coordinator.<sup>13</sup> Eschatological themes permeate this letter. Even though Paul didn’t separate his letter into chapters, the concluding thought of each chapter takes our eyes heavenward, anticipating Christ’s return. Like the old man who nightly pushed back his bedroom curtain and asked, “Will it be tonight, Lord?”, so too, the Thessalonians seemed to be obsessed with Judgment Day and what comes after it. Whether it was via Timothy’s report or his own personal experience, Paul knew how heavily this weighed on their hearts and minds. And above all, that seems to be what Paul wanted to address as he “encouraged them with these words.”

### An Exegesis of Chapter One

**Verse 1** – Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη.

**JSH** *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.*

**NIV11** *Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.*

<sup>9</sup> Personally, I don’t think Paul was so much defending his apostleship and absence as he was simply putting the hearts of the Thessalonians at rest. When you compare this defense to that before the Galatians, it seems a bit more “oh, and by the way, I’m for real.” Also, the fact that Paul does not use the title “apostle” in his greeting is indication that his apostolic authority was not being questioned. This will be discussed further in the exegesis portion of the paper.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 4:12. At the recent Symposium on Lutheran Schools, MLC President Mark Zarling said it well regarding this verse. “Read it carefully. ‘We’ – everyone of us here, and every person we serve. ‘Must’ – not an option. ‘Many’ – not just an occasional bump in the road. ‘Hardships’ (θλίψεις) – painful pressures, physical and emotional, tribulation, affliction. Over and over again the Lord Jesus lovingly forwarns his precious children that the life centered in him will be a life of temporary hardship. Our life is indeed under the cross!”

<sup>11</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

<sup>12</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:24

<sup>13</sup> Out of the twelve “Second Lessons” appointed for End Times in the *Christian Worship* pericope, four are from the letters to the Thessalonians, twice as much as any other book.

**NIV84** *Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.*

### **“Paul, Silas and Timothy”**

This missionary team could have looked much different. If Paul’s first mission partner would have had his way, this letter would have read, “Paul and Barnabas and John.” But the disagreement over John Mark caused a parting of ways. Thus, Silas (one of the original “leaders among the brothers” as commissioned by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15) became Paul’s right-hand man. Whenever Paul writes of Silas, he uses the longer name, Σιλουανός, whereas Luke refers to him as Σίλας. Σίλας may simply be the Greek variant of the name Σιλουανός, or a contraction of the same (e.g., Pete/Peter. Speaking of Peter, he also uses the longer name in his first letter).

While this wasn’t the original mission team, one has to marvel at God’s intervening hand. When Paul set out from Antioch, he had no intention of going to Greece, but that’s where the Lord led. Is it anything less than God’s providence that Timothy, the Grecian Jew, was along with them, after having been picked up in Lystra along the way?

Of particular interest with Paul’s greeting is the lack of titles. In nine out of thirteen letters, Paul appeals to his apostleship in his greeting. Besides in the letters to the Thessalonians, Paul only sheds the “Apostle” title in his letter to the Philippians and Philemon (although he refers to himself as “servant of Christ” and “prisoner of Christ” in those letters). So why no titles to the Thessalonians? Why not appeal to his apostleship in writing to the Thessalonians and the Philippians? Looking at the letters and their positive tone, could it be that his apostleship was never brought into question in these two cities, thus there was no need for his self-authentication (as much as an inspired writer can authenticate himself)?

The fact that he chooses not to use the title “apostle” in his greeting, leads me to believe that the defense of his apostleship in chapter two was meant primarily to calm the hearts of the Thessalonians rather than proving his authority as one sent by God.

### **“Church of the Thessalonians”**

Compare to Paul’s other greetings:

- “To all in Rome”
- “To the church of God in Corinth”
- “To the churches in Galatia”
- “To the saints in Ephesus”
- “To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi”

Do you catch the difference? Every other greeting speaks of the congregation located in such-n-such a town. But here, Paul does not write, “to the church in Thessalonica,” rather, “to the church of the Thessalonians.” This is the only greeting where the city takes on the genitive form of its residents.

Significance? Perhaps not. But I wonder if the distinction could be that one stresses the location, the other the people. This greeting<sup>14</sup> seems to have a much more personal tone, which again could reflect Paul’s admiration for these faithful believers.

**Verse 2** – Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως

**JSH** *We are giving thanks to God always on behalf of all of you, continually making a remembrance of you at the time of our prayers.*

<sup>14</sup> Paul greeted the Thessalonians the same way in his second letter.

**NIV11** *We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.*

**NIV84** *We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.*

### ***Paul, the Praying Pastor***

Whether it's the present tense, the double παν (παντοτε and παντων), or the collective praying done by this missionary team (check out the plurals), Paul paints the model of a praying pastor. The connection between “giving thanks” (Εὐχαριστοῦμεν) and “prayers” (προσευχῶν) struck me this time more than before. εὐχαριζῶ deals with the attitude inside of us and προσευχη, stresses the ευχη, being thrown to someone outside of us.

By having Paul paint this portrait so early in his letter, it adds volume to the seemingly rushed exhortation at the end of this letter to “pray continually.”<sup>15</sup> He was not simply a “do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do” preacher, rather a model for them to follow

I question whether the final adverb (ἀδιαλείπτως – literally, “not leaving a gap”<sup>16</sup>) ought to be applied to this verse or the next.<sup>17</sup> In my first run through of this text, I shifted ἀδιαλείπτως to the next verse, thinking it made more sense to stress the time element with “remembering the work, toil and endurance” as my verse 2 translation already factored in a time element, saying Paul made mention of these people “at the time of his prayers” (applying the ἐπὶ + Dative as an expression of time). However, the fact that Paul links προσευχῶν and ἀδιαλείπτως<sup>18</sup> in his well-known “pray continually” exhortation later on in the letter helps to convince me that the adverb is better suited in verse 2.

A point to go home with is simply how much time Paul must have spent in prayer. We're all familiar with Luther's statement that on some days he was just so busy that he had to pray for hours. Noting that Paul was not only making a memory (μνείαν ποιούμενοι) of the Thessalonians, but also the Romans, the Ephesians, the Philippians, Timothy and Philemon, in addition to his own pleading with the Lord, prayer must have consumed much of Paul's pastoral work.<sup>19</sup>

### **DISCUSSION POINT – How can we be better praying pastors?**

**Verse 3** – μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,

**JSH** *Remembering your activity of faith and your toil of love and your perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ before our God and Father.*

**NIV11** *We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Ray Pritchard, president of Keep Believing Ministries makes this point about prayer that captures the meaning of ἀδιαλείπτως: “Prayer bridges the gap between people. You can be here and they can be way over there, and through prayer you can bridge the gap that separates you. Prayer spans the miles that separate us. Prayer overcomes the misunderstanding that separates us. Prayer leaps across the bad memories that pull us apart. Prayer nullifies the estrangement that keeps us from speaking.” For a practical application of this, consider the following marriage advice: When you find yourself in the middle of a “disagreement,” try to stop and pray. It's almost impossible to pick up with the yelling after speaking the “Amen.”

<sup>17</sup> Note the difference between the NIV translations. 1984 places ἀδιαλείπτως with the verse 3, while NIV 2011 retains it with verse 2.

<sup>18</sup> Some non-biblical sources have used this adverb to describe an “incessant cough.” And so the idea is not so much that of uninterrupted prayer, but of a constantly recurring prayer – praying every time you have a tickle in your throat.

<sup>19</sup> When I think of everybody and everything for which Paul prayed, I believe he must have mastered (or motivated) Luther's advice: “Brief prayers...pregnant with the Spirit, strongly fortified by faith...the fewer the words, the better the prayer. The more the words, the worse the prayer. Few words and much meaning is Christian. Many words and little meaning is pagan.” As found in Luther's *A Simple Way to Pray*.

**NIV84** *We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A discussion and exegesis on this verse alone could serve our conference well. The three couplets (work of faith, toil of love, and endurance inspired by hope) are so rich, not only in and of themselves but how they compare to one another. First I will attempt to discuss each couplet on its own, then contrast it to its counterpart in the other couplets.<sup>20</sup>

### **“Work produced by faith”**

While cautious to never link faith and works in discussions of justification, whenever we speak of sanctification, faith and works make a perfect pair. If you are like me, you have gone to the well of James many times and said, “Faith without works is dead.”<sup>21</sup> But perhaps it would be better to go to the well of the Thessalonians once in a while for a positive example of faith in action.<sup>22</sup> In order to stress the positive, natural outflow of faith, at least in this case, “action” or “activity” would be my preferred translation for *ἔργου*, which first and foremost serves as an antonym of “rest.”

The English word, “work,” at least in my mind has more of a negative connotation. While people, especially in this economy, want to “work,” I have yet to meet someone who doesn’t enjoy a day off of “work.” Faith does not take a vacation from “work.” It always is doing something because that’s what it does. It’s natural. And it’s often beautiful. One of the most beautiful biblical examples of faith in action is the woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany.<sup>23</sup> In his defense of her actions, Jesus says she has done a “beautiful thing” (*καλὸν ἔργον*). I hardly believe the woman considered her expression of love for Jesus as “work” in the same way a foundry worker grabs his lunch pail and heads off to “work.”

What activity of faith did Paul remember about the Thessalonians? Among other things, verse 9 supplies some answers. Yes, the Thessalonians provided a wonderful reception for these traveling apostles, but even more importantly they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

**For you to ponder: What are the “activities of faith” that you remember about your people?**

### **“Labor prompted by love”**

While “work” (*ἔργον*), can be a neutral or even a positive term, “labor” (*κόπου*) never is a walk in the park. In secular Greek, it means “beating” or the “weariness” caused by it. Whether it’s physical or mental, there is some sort of exhaustion or hardship that comes with *κόπος*. Interestingly enough, this word is also used in the Bethany anointment account, but it’s Jesus speaking to the naysayers, “Why are you *bothering* her?” The apostle Paul employs *κόπος* many times to describe his missionary efforts. Between the shipwrecks and beatings, who could say his ministry was simply a “job” or “work.” It was, in the truest sense of the word, “labor.”

But why does love (*τῆς ἀγάπης*) prompt labor? While *agape* is something that God wills for us to have for all people, even our enemies, we will be the first to admit that it is much easier to agape people who are

<sup>20</sup> For those grammarians out there – here are the two most popular options for these couplets:

Option #1 -- The first genitive of each couplet (*ἔργου*, *κόπου*, and *ὑπομονῆς*) are exegetical, explaining their corresponding nouns. The “main” nouns (faith, love and hope) are then objective genitives of the participle, “remembering”.

Option #2 – The first genitive of each couplet could be the object of the participle (i.e., that which is remembered). If so, the trailing genitive noun becomes a subjective genitive, i.e., that which does the action (faith works, love labors and hope perseveres).

<sup>21</sup> James 2:17 “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

<sup>22</sup> Let this be a plug for WELS Kingdom Workers which appropriately calls their volunteer opportunities, “Faith in Action.”

<sup>23</sup> Mark 14:1-9, especially verse 6

close to you. Consider how your actions different for those you love versus those whom you could love a little more. For example, I only changed diapers (I don't miss that toil!) for my own kids. Hand me your kid and I'll politely refuse. On a larger scale, look at the great lengths that parents go for their children. A few years back, when my son had a seizure and was placed into the hospital, my wife and mother-in-law drove through the night from their girls' weekend to come home. They would not have done that if I said, "The neighbor boy is in the hospital." I'll gladly (as much as one can "gladly" spend) spend thousands of dollars to clothe, feed and educate my kids. When company stays longer than three days, being the cheap-skate that I am, I start adding up receipts in my head wondering how much I'm going to have to spend on these people.

But is that right? True *agape* love should not and does not consider the recipient of my actions. Rather, *agape* love is an attitude within that springs into action. When God *agaped* us, we were not the ones prompting his labor. His *agape* prompted his labor for us. And the only way to have that labor-prompting *agape* for others is to be filled and appreciate Christ's *agape* which labored for us.

Thus, this is no small compliment that Paul is passing on to the Thessalonians. The fact that they were willing to toil and exert themselves to the point of fatigue was a wonderful way of expressing his joy that God's *agape* was flowing out of their hearts.

### **Discussion Point: How does your love for your flock affect your labor?**

#### ***"Endurance inspired by hope"***

Very literally, *ὑπομονή*, means to remain or abide under something. But it is not simply "putting up" with things. It is not a resignation that says, "It's just the way it is so I'll have to live with it." Paul is not simply telling the Thessalonians, "Way to hang in there." This endurance is heroic. It's patient bravery at its best. It is a Trench says, "that temper of spirit in which we accept God's dealing with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting."<sup>24</sup> You may disagree, but in our world of "instantly" or "what have you done for me lately," I believe endurance is a characteristic that is fading. A look at the ever-rising divorce rate, or the lack of willingness to even commit to marriage, is an example of people's growing unwillingness to endure. Or look at the job-turnover rate. According to the very reliable [www.wiki.answers.com](http://www.wiki.answers.com), this generation will have 7-10 jobs in their lifetime after the age of 25 while the previous generation was 5-7. How does this affect ministry? Understand that if we and/or our flock follow Scripture, we will be swimming against the tide. Thus may we be ever so quick to encourage endurance and offer Pauline praise when we see the saints doing such.

However, we dare not think that brave, heroic endurance is something that can be fostered from within. True, eyes-on-the-prize endurance always has and always will be inspired by the hope (*ἐλπίδος*) that we have. In the midst of opposition, the Thessalonians would cling more and more to the hope that Jesus would return to rescue them, not only from their present situation, but ultimately from the coming wrath (1:10).<sup>25</sup>

#### ***"Faith...Love... Hope"***

If that doesn't sound quite right to your ears, maybe you're more Corinthian than Thessalonian (not necessarily a good thing). Whether it's the Pier 1 picture on our wall or the wedding quilt from Aunt Edna, we are accustomed to seeing "Faith...Hope... Love", the greatest of which is love. So why the switch up here?

Actually, 1 Corinthians seems to be the switch up. Four times these powerful words find themselves crammed into one verse, three of which they show up in this order.<sup>26</sup> Is there a connection or is it just random? When you think about it, faith...love... hope is very logical. Faith needs to come first. Without faith, there would be no appreciation for love or motivation to labor. Likewise, if laboring in love was a piece of cake, there would be no reason for endurance. Therefore, it is a very chronological list. In other words, faith rests on the past; love works in the present; hope looks to the future. If you're looking for a nice three-part sermon on

<sup>24</sup> Trench, R.C. *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> *ἔργον*, *κόπος*, and *ὑπομονή*, are the same words used in the Revelation letter to Ephesus (Revelation 2:2)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Colossians 1:5 & 1 Thessalonians 5:8



this, your parts could be: 1) Faith looks back to a crucified Savior; 2) Love looks up to a crowned Savior; and 3) Hope looks forward to a coming Savior.<sup>27</sup>

### **“Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>28</sup>**

Permit me a confession of my youth: I regularly visited a congregation where the pastor could not say, “Lord”, “Jesus” or “Christ” as standalone names for our Savior. Rather, he would always refer to “our Lord Jesus Christ”, so much so that the sermon became not so much a spiritually edifying twenty minutes, but a 20-minute math exercise where we would count the number of times he said, “our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup> I personally remember topping out at 76 times in one sermon.

I don’t say this to simply get you to guess which pastor said such words. I bring it up here as a reminder not to let this trifecta become cliché. Of all the letters that Paul wrote, in his letters to the Thessalonians this is his favorite way of referring to our Savior. Fourteen times in the eight chapters, he refers to Jesus as our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> Considering it’s abundant in both letters to the church of the Thessalonians, I have to believe that the Holy Spirit wasn’t simply on a tangent by inspiring these titles for the second person of the Trinity. When you consider that Gentiles (of which there were many in Thessalonica) referred to their leaders as *κύριοι* and the gods of nearby Mt. Olympus were also called the same, one can understand why the Holy Spirit employed these common-to-our-ears names to emphasize the one who was the true *κύριος*.

### **”Before our God and Father”**

With its placement, both NIV84 and NIV11 tip their hand as to what they think “before our God and Father” modifies, namely the participle “remembering.” One cannot argue that since Paul was praying, he was remembering them before his heavenly Father. However, the Greek is not so clear cut. With its location in the sentence, “before our God and Father” could be a description of our Lord Jesus Christ, telling us where he is, or it could be in reference to the Thessalonians’ work, labor and endurance being carried out “before our God and Father.”

My personal choice is the latter. Since Paul’s main point of this letter is to encourage them in the midst of persecution and continue to live their faith, I could find great comfort in knowing that while I may not recognized my peers, my Father in heaven knows what I’ve been going through. I find it similar to patting that veteran pastor or struggling pastor on the back and saying, “Soon you’ll hear the words of your Savior, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

**Verse 4** – εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν,

**JSH** *Knowing, brothers loved by God, your calling.*

**NIV11** *For we know, brothers and sisters<sup>31</sup> loved by God, that he has chosen you,*

**NIV84** *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,*

### **“Brothers loved by God”**

<sup>27</sup> In all honesty, my notes have this as coming from Lightfoot, but I failed to note my source.

<sup>28</sup> *Note: All three phrases ultimately have our Lord Jesus Christ as their source (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) and their object.*

<sup>29</sup> Permit me another confession, I chuckled in my office just thinking about it.

<sup>30</sup> The two Corinthian letters use this phrase twelve times, but that’s over the course of twenty-nine chapters. Every other letter is much less.

<sup>31</sup> You probably note the “gender inclusive” language of NIV11. The point of this paper is not to discuss the pros and cons of this translation. However, let me say here that while *ἀδελφοὶ* means “brothers”, there certainly is nothing wrong with adding “sisters” in the target language. How many of us start out a sermon saying, “Brothers *and sisters* in Christ”?

As far as I could find, it is only here and in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 that Paul links the terms “brothers” and “loved by God” or “loved by the Lord.” What a beautiful string to describe his listeners. So often we refer to our “brothers in the ministry” or our “brothers in Christ”, stressing our horizontal relationship with fellow believers. What an awesome way to look at others as people who are recipients of God’s love.

The perfect passive participle also stresses that long before these Thessalonians were living their faith, they were loved by God, an act of grace that was showing results to this day.

**“For we know... that he has chosen you”**

In the context of offering encouragement in the midst of persecution, what a wonderful thing to point the Thessalonians to their election! Because election falls into one of those “hard to understand” categories,<sup>32</sup> the tendency may not be to use it for the comfort that God intended. May we not fall into that trap.

**Verse 5** – ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφῶρῃ πολλῇ, καθὼς οἴδατε οἷοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι’ ὑμᾶς.

**JSH** *Because our gospel did not happen to you in word alone, but also with power and with the Holy Spirit and with much supreme fullness, just as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*

**NIV11** *because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.*

**NIV84** *because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.*

**“Our gospel”**

How do you know if your people are among the elect? Perhaps we don’t care to admit that we’ve at least thought that question, even if we never had the gumption to ask it. Likewise, Satan has also caused sleepless nights among many who have asked it of themselves (we’d be hypocrites if we claimed never to hear Satan’s whispers to that effect.) But what a place of reassurance Paul takes the Thessalonians to in this verse. With the beginning ὅτι, he indicates that he knows that his listeners are chosen because of what the gospel did to them. It came with power, the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

Just as Paul tells the Romans in the great comfort chapter of the Bible, “those he predestined, he also called.” God called the predestined Thessalonians by the gospel. God has called you by the gospel. Whenever we doubt our election, go back to the gospel.

Yet Paul calls it “our gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν).” Why does he add the possessive pronoun? Allow me these two suggestions: 1) it was Paul’s gospel in contrast to the “good” news that the Thessalonians may have heard from other traveling missionaries or philosophers; and/or 2) Paul was so married to the Scriptures that how could he not call it his own. Just listen how the locals refer to the Packers as “our” team or “we won on Sunday.” How much better to make the gospel our own!

**“You know how we lived among you for your sake”**

Exactly (καθὼς) what the apostle has witnessed in the Thessalonians, (i.e., that they received the gospel with power, the Holy Spirit and deep conviction) he is assuming that is what the Thessalonians witnessed in Paul, Silas and Timothy when they were in their midst. A word of caution, Paul is not saying that their personal

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Peter 3:16

character or behavior created a better working of the gospel among the Thessalonians. Rather, he is simply making the correlation between the results of the gospel on the Thessalonians and Paul.

**React to this statement:** “The kind of men who preach the gospel means a good deal regarding the effect their preaching produces. This does not imply that they add to the power of the gospel, they may, however, decrease its all-sufficient native power. They may be a clogged channel through which only a little power can flow.”<sup>33</sup>

**Verse 6** – Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου,

**JSH** *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the Word in the sphere of much persecution along with joy of the Holy Spirit.*

**NIV11** *You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering<sup>34</sup> with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

**NIV84** *You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

Imitation is the highest form of flattery. But how would you react if someone said, “Hey, you’re just like me and Jesus?” My initial reaction would be, “Who does this guy think he is? He thinks he’s like Jesus?” Obviously, the apostle who considered himself to be the “chief of sinners” would never put his sanctified living on par with the perfect Son of God.

But Jesus himself tells us that we can expect to be “like him” in regards to persecution<sup>35</sup>, the very thing of which Paul speaks. If they come after the Shepherd, they’ll come after the sheep. In other words, this is not boasting on Paul’s part, rather it is a source of comfort. Case in point: the day before I wrote this section of the paper, one of our congregational leaders in a “successful” area of ministry was frustrated because of the “persecution” she was receiving. I appreciate my brother’s words to her, “If you weren’t doing valuable ministry, the devil would be leaving you alone. Find comfort in the fact that he’s coming after you.” That’s basically what Paul is telling the Thessalonians. As difficult as it is to face persecution, it’s a good thing. Ultimately, it shows your connection to Christ. But before you become too discouraged that being a Christian is all bad news, also note the fruit of the Spirit produced in these Thessalonians: joy.

**Verse 7** – ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ.

**JSH** *So that you became a mark for all who are believing in Macedonia and in Achaia.*

**NIV11** *And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*

**NIV84** *And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*

The ὥστε result clause is a wonderful reminder of how our actions will catch the attention of others. In this case, it is a positive model or impression (τύπον). The picture of τύπος<sup>36</sup> is to strike or stamp something. Think of the old typewriters (note the connection between “type” and τύπον) where a metal arm struck an ink

<sup>33</sup> RCH Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon.*

<sup>34</sup> The NIV11 does a better job of translating the ἐν θλίψει than the NIV84.

<sup>35</sup> John 15:20, “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

<sup>36</sup> τύπος is also the word used to speak of the nail-marks in Jesus’ hands and feet.

tape and left an impression on the paper. So too, our actions will leave a mark on those who observe us. We dare not underestimate the long-reaching effects our modeling can have. Here Paul says that the Thessalonians not only served as a model in their own region of Macedonia, but they also served as a model for the southern region of Achaia, from where he was writing. Not to mention, the fact that we are considering the Thessalonians today as a model shows the far-reaching effects of their God-pleasing lives. Granted, apostles may not record our actions in the enduring Word of God so that believers will be talking about us in the year 4011, but do not underestimate how long our actions leave their impression, e.g., recently I heard a pastor quote some study that said the actions of one person typically affects six generations in that family.

**For Discussion: How comfortable are we about holding up believers in our congregation as models for others?**

**Verse 8** – ἀφ’ ὑμῶν γὰρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ [ἐν τῇ] Ἀχαΐᾳ, ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἢ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐξελέλυθεν, ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι.

**JSH** *For from you, the word of the Lord has rung out not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but in every place. Your faith which is before God has gone out, so that it is not necessary for us to speak it.*

**NIV11** *The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,*

**NIV84** *The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,*

### “The Lord’s message rang out”

Without skipping a beat, Paul points out an even more noble trait about these Thessalonians. Yes, they welcomed the message (and messengers) in the midst of affliction; yes, they received the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit; but subsequently they rang (ἐξήχηται<sup>37</sup>) that message out as if they were blaring out a trumpet that just kept on echoing (see the connection between Greek and English). The sound waves of their blaring had quite an effect, temporally (as indicated by the perfect tense) and spatially. Note Paul’s strong emphasis that their faith not only made ripples in Macedonia and Achaia, BUT (ἀλλ’) in every place.

What I find particularly refreshing in this section is that there isn’t a hint of jealousy, competition or resentment in Paul’s voice. I can think of various ministries within our WELS that have far-reaching effects and it seems we are all too often quick to judge the ministry instead of celebrating the sound waves. I will cherish the words of brother in the ministry who pointed out, “We’re quick to mourn with those who mourn. But the Bible also says, ‘Rejoice with those who rejoice.’”<sup>38</sup>

### “Your faith in God”

While “faith in God” is nothing to necessarily comment on, the particular way it shows up in the Greek is unique, as far as I could find. Literally, it says, “your faith, the faith that is toward God” (ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεόν).<sup>39</sup> Why does Paul use that verbiage here? As πρὸς carries with it an idea of motion, i.e., turning toward something, Paul’s choice of words introduce what follows in verse nine, namely that the Thessalonians turned *to God* from idols.

<sup>37</sup> Only time this word occurs in the New Testament.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 12:15

<sup>39</sup> Other “faith in God” expressions are as follows: πίστιν θεοῦ (e.g. Mark 11:22); πιστεύω γὰρ τῷ θεῷ (e.g. Acts 27:25); or πίστεως ἐπὶ θεόν (e.g. Hebrews 6:1)

**“Therefore we do not need to say anything about it”**

Linguistically, probably not much to say here, but the illustrations are numerous. Someone who just gets engaged and walks into a room, surrounding people know something good has just happened. A good (and bad) reputation often precedes us wherever we go so that we “need not say anything about it.”<sup>40</sup>

**Verse 9** – αὐτοὶ γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ

**JSH** *For they themselves concerning us are reporting what kind of entrance we had before you and how you turned toward the God, away from the idols, to serve the living and true God.*

**NIV11** *for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*

**NIV84** *for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*

**“For they themselves report”**

Just would like to point out the present tense of ἀπαγγέλλουσιν<sup>41</sup> (report). This was not something that people told Paul once and then stopped. Wherever and whenever he went, he heard about these Thessalonians.

**“From idols”**

Being that the Thessalonians were living in the shadow of Mt. Olympus, it is safe to assume that their idols consisted of something honoring the Greek gods. Louw-Nida makes a distinction between “idol” and “image”, noting that an image is only the representation of some supernatural being while an idol is something that people believe actually possesses supernatural power, aka, a good luck charm.

**“To serve the living and true God”**

The contrast between the “idols” and the God of the Bible is obvious. One is dead, the other living. One is false, the other true. It is interesting to note though the Thessalonians were not only worshipping or trusting in this living, true God, they were *servicing* δουλεύειν him, indicating that their behavior was changed. Unfortunately, this would become a bit of an issue in the future when they stopped serving and only waited for this living God to act (2 Thessalonians 3:6ff).

**Verse 10** – καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης.

**JSH** *And to wait for his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

**NIV11** *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

**NIV84** *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

<sup>40</sup> On a lighter side, I was talking to my new associate John Qualmann about the brothers in our conference. I mentioned, “Robb Robbert” and he laughed (in a good way). In other words, I didn’t need to say anything about him as his reputation preceded him.

<sup>41</sup> The word ἀπαγγέλλουσιν has the same intensity of proclaiming as ἀπαγγέλλουσιν, however the prefix ἀπο adds the idea that you are reporting from what you observed. This, for example, is the command that Jesus gave to John the Baptist’s disciples when he said, “Go and *tell* John what you see and hear” (Matthew 11:4).

***“Who rescues us from the coming wrath”***

With this concluding verse of chapter one, Paul in a roundabout way uses the “greater to lesser” argument to bring comfort to these Thessalonians who are enduring the *thlipsin* of persecution. Jesus is their rescuer (τὸν ῥυόμενον) from something far more serious than persecution brought on by jealous Jews or raucous Romans. Jesus is their rescuer from “the coming wrath” (τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης). The verb ῥύομαι is reserved to emphasize two things: the intense danger *and* the mighty power it takes to deliver. It is a word that was used to describe the heroic act of a soldier fighting through enemy lines to rescue his wounded comrade on a battlefield. Or you could picture someone wading in a river when suddenly they are caught in the current, powerless to save themselves. As they cry out, someone hears and holds out a hand as they go rushing by. As they lie beside the river safe in the presence of the one who pulled them out, they still are in the presence of the dangerous rushing current... they can hear it... they can see it... but they’ve been delivered from danger.

The present tense of the participle is also a beautiful thought for Christians as we go through life. While Jesus’ life, death and resurrection are done and over with, thus securing our justification, it is a wonderful picture to see Jesus as our present day rescuer. If I only think of him as someone who rescued me in the past, I may fret about the present and future dangers. If I only see Jesus as someone who will rescue me in the future, I will fret about present dangers, wondering when Jesus is going to care enough to come and rescue me. But when I see Jesus as the One who rescues, it does not matter where I am or when I am in trouble, I know that I have beside me who rescues me from every evil attack, no matter how great or small that may be.

That’s the message Paul wanted to leave for the Thessalonians. That’s the message I need to hear. That’s the message our people need to hear. “We are safe. Economic or atomic threats cannot shatter our security; not even the end of this world’s time of grace can plunge us into wrath. We have been rescued! No need for us to preach sensational ‘fire and brimstone’ sermons; we preach Christ crucified who rescues us from wrath.”<sup>42</sup> Encourage each other with these words.

*SDG*

*Your fellow brother loved by the Lord,  
Joel S. Heckendorf ~ Immanuel, Greenville*

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<sup>42</sup> E.H. Wendland, *Sermon Studies on the Epistles: Series A.*” 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.