

## Message #2

## II Thessalonians 1:1-2

There is a story written about a young man who was very determined to win the affection of a young lady who refused to even see him. She did not like the guy and had no interest in marrying him. The young man decided that the way to win this girl was to win her through the mail. He decided to write her a bunch of love letters. He wrote her one letter per day and mailed it. When she didn't respond, he decided to increase his letters to three per day. All in all, he wrote this girl more than 700 letters and finally, after all of those letters the girl ended up marrying the mail carrier.

God decided to win us through written letters. In fact, God inspired 66 books in writing to win His people and out of the 66 inspired books (39 O.T. books and 27 N.T. books) at least 13 (perhaps 14 if you count Hebrews) were written by the Apostle Paul.

Now when Paul wrote these inspired letters, he did not hand the church a whopper of a story like the Mormon liar Joseph Smith, who said in 1823 that some angel gave him gold plates that he was to copy and translate. When Paul wrote these inspired letters, he did not try to sell the church a story like the Muslim liar Muhammad, who started telling people that he was seeing visions and revelations of God, which he recorded in his Koran.

When Paul wrote real inspired letters from God, he simply used his personality and his vocabulary to write a letter and God would see to it that this letter was preserved and put in His precious Word.

Just recently, I was examining manuscript evidence pertaining to **verse 2** of II Thessalonians and just in this verse there are over 25 manuscripts which do not include lectionaries, translations or quotations. Paul wrote a letter and God did the rest in preserving it for the public.

It is very interesting to see how inspired letters in the Bible open. They open in a typical way that other letters opened at the time they were written. A typical secular letter opened with the introduction of the writer, the introduction of the recipient and some greeting. We may clearly see this in Acts 23:26 which says, "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings."

**The big difference between Paul's letters and secular letters is that all the letters Paul wrote that are in the Bible are inspired by God. All Scripture is inspired by God (II Tim. 3:16). According to Jesus Christ, all Scripture is inspired to the very words which were written (Revelation 22:18).**

So when any book of the Bible opens, it is more than just a few words designed to fill up space on a blank sheet of paper. These words are important and inspired. This is certainly true with the opening words of II Thessalonians.

Now when you first read the opening words of II Thessalonians, it appears to be the same as the opening words of I Thessalonians, but as we shall see there are two main differences. But Richard Lenski, the Lutheran scholar, makes a good observation when he says by virtue of the fact that the book opens very similar to I Thessalonians, it does tell us that the apostolic attitude toward the Thessalonians was the same. They still esteemed this church and loved this church and believed in this church (*II Thessalonians*, p. 373). They were fighting for truth for this church. **There are three introduction parts to these opening two verses:**

**INTRODUCTION PART #1** – The introduction of those writing this letter. **1:1a**

The opening introduction of Paul and his team is identical with the way he opened up I Thessalonians. Now the truth is this letter is being written by Paul (II Thess. 3:17), but he is mentioning these other men who are with him not as just a matter of courtesy, but these were three critical men connected to this church of Thessalonica. These people knew these guys.

The conjunctions “and” (καί) which links Paul with Silvanus and Silvanus with Timothy are coordinate conjunctions which means Paul is beginning this letter by presenting the idea that this is a coequal team, comprised of coequal partners. As Paul begins this letter, there is no grammatical demonstration of superiority versus inferiority. Paul is the key man, but he is sharing his ministry with these other two men and his knowledge. In fact, the grace Gospel which he specifically said is “my gospel” (Rom. 2:16), he calls “our gospel” in II Thessalonians 2:14.

Paul was not a man who had some big ego problem. He was not some power-crazed politician. He did not have to be in the limelight. He didn't have to chair the board meetings or be elected to some religious leadership position. In fact, he didn't like the limelight, which is so foreign to so many in ministry who love to get up in front of people and have them look at them. The pope dresses up so all people will look at him. We have all been in hospitals where some religious man or woman is wearing special clothing so people will look at them. Paul was not like that. He was basically a quiet, private man and along the way he shared who he was and what he knew with others.

Now there is no question that Paul was very particular with whom he shared his ministry, so we may assume that these two were very faithful men of God or else Paul would have never named them in the same coequal language. You do not read Paul sharing his ministry with a guy like Demas or Alexander the coppersmith, or Hymenaeus or Philetus. So these were two very faithful men of God.

Now he already wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians so why again formally introduce the ministry team members? **The answer is there was obviously at least one fraudulent letter that was being circulated that was claiming it was Pauline (II Thess. 2:2). By Paul again introducing the three ministry team members, he is establishing that this is another real letter from him.**

As Paul opens this Epistle he introduces three ministry team members:

**Ministry Team Member #1** - The Thessalonians were introduced to Paul . **1:1a**

**Now the first thing that catches our eye is that again Paul does not identify himself as an apostle .** John Calvin said Paul didn't do this because he didn't have to. These believers in Thessalonica knew he was a very gifted apostle of God to the point he did not have to write it or prove it. Since Paul's eschatology is under attack, one would think he might use the noun in an authoritative way, but apparently to this church he did not have to. They knew he was a high-ranked man of God.

Truth is Paul was the leading apostle for the Grace/Gentile Age. He was the one stopped personally by Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). These other guys weren't. The grace Gospel had been specifically entrusted to him by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12) and Paul said the entire dispensation and stewardship of grace was specifically given to him (Eph. 3:2; I Tim. 1:11).

But Paul did not strut around telling people this all the time, even though it is true. There were times he mentioned these things, but he did not broadcast this continually.

**Ministry Team Member #2** - The Thessalonians were introduced to Silvanus . **1:1b**

**Now Silvanus is the Roman citizenship Latin name that Paul always used, but when Luke refers to him he always uses the name "Silas," which is his Greek name.**

By simple comparison of Acts 18:5 which talks about "Silas and Timothy" coming down from Macedonia, with II Corinthians 1:19 which talks about "Silvanus and Timothy" being in Macedonia, we may easily see that Silvanus and Silas are one and the same person.

We do this all the time. For example, sometimes a person has the name James and we call him Jim. Sometimes a person has the name Robert and we call him Bob. Sometimes a person has the name Joel and we call him Joe, or Michael and we call him Mike. It refers to the same person. Silvanus is Silas and Silas is Silvanus.

Now Silas first met Paul when Paul was in Jerusalem defending the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 15:22). He was a leading Jew in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22); he had the gift of prophecy (Acts 15:32) and he was a very skilled teacher of the Word (Acts 15:32). In fact, the church historian Eusebius used Silas as an illustration of one with a gift of prophecy to prove that this gift was not some involuntary, ecstatic psychosis (*The History of the Church*, p. 222). Silas was a serious communicator of God's Word. He was also a Roman citizen like Paul (Acts 16:19, 37).

Silas' first assignment with Paul was to travel with him to Antioch of Syria in order to communicate to the church that the apostles and elders of the church of Jerusalem had agreed with Paul's presentation of the grace Gospel.

Paul must have been very impressed with Silas because after his split with Barnabas, Paul chose Silas to become part of his ministry team (Acts 15:40). He became a trusted and loyal friend to Paul and a great defender of the grace Gospel.

He was willing to risk his own life right beside Paul for the sake of the truth. Now Silas had originally gone with Paul to Thessalonica (Acts 17:4). He had to leave the city with Paul at night because people were out to kill them (Acts 17:10).

It is somewhat odd that after Paul leaves Corinth, Silas seems to disappear. It is very possible that he ended up with the Apostle Peter because Peter refers to a man whom he referred to as being a highly regarded brother whose name was Silvanus (I Pet. 5:12). So Silas earned a good name with all the apostles.

There is some speculation on how Silas died. Some historians say he died peacefully in Corinth after becoming Pastor of the church. Eusebius writes that there were a couple of men named Silvanus who were eventually martyred. One was fed to wild beasts and the other was beheaded (*Ibid.*, p. 345). What we do know is that he was a very faithful man of God who was a dear friend to Paul and his name stands forever in that regard.

### **Ministry Team Member #3** - The Thessalonians were introduced to Timothy. **1:1c**

Timothy was also a man special to Paul and to the Thessalonians. He was unique to Paul in that Paul said there was no one like him (Phil. 2:20-22). Paul honors Timothy as being his partner in including him in his letters of II Corinthians, Philipians, Colossians and Philemon. Paul specifically wrote Timothy two inspired letters. Timothy was the youngest team member with Paul, but he was also an important team member and the Thessalonians knew him.

It was Timothy who specifically went back to Thessalonica and brought good news to Paul concerning their faith and love (I Thess. 3:6). So Timothy was a key part of Paul's ministry to the Thessalonian church.

A false letter had surfaced and Paul wanted these men to realize this team was still functioning and still together. This would mean a great deal to the Thessalonian church.

### **INTRODUCTION PART #2** – The introduction of those receiving this letter. **1:1b**

The recipients of the letter are identified three ways:

#### **Identification #1** - The letter was written to the church (τη εκκλησια).

Now the noun “church” is comprised of two words “ek” (εκ) which means out and “kaleo” (καλεω) which means call. **So the meaning of the word church is to call out.** So a real church is a group of people who have been specifically called out by God from the world and called into grace.

Probably few who go to church recognize how sacred church actually is, but a true church has people in it who have actually and specifically been called to faith by God.

It is interesting the noun church contains an article which means this is a very specific church. This letter was specifically written to a specific church. The written Word of God is to be carefully studied and analyzed in each specific church.

**Identification #2** - The letter was written to the church of the Thesslonians .

This church was located in a real city. When Paul wrote this Epistle, Thessalonica was a big, active and impressive city. There were lots of job opportunities, lots of religious opportunities and lots of sin opportunities. It was to this kind of city that God sent His written Word. We know that the members of this church were thinking people. We learn from the book of Acts that there were a good number of very religious Jews and God-fearing Greeks and high-ranked women in this church (Acts 17:4). Many of the people in this church had come to faith in Jesus Christ from a life of religious idolatry (I Thess. 1:9). These Thessalonians formed a church and they were dead serious about understanding God's Word.

**Identification #3** - The letter was written to the Thessalonian church who is in God our Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Now here is where the letter differs slightly from I Thessalonians. The differing point is the inclusion of the pronoun "our."** As Paul opens this letter, he wants to stress the fact that the relationship we have with God is very personal. **Some false letter had surfaced and Paul (II Thess. 2:2) specifically wanted the Thessalonians to realize the real true God is our God, not their God.**

We who know the Lord have a bond with God. He legitimately and literally is "our" God. Now carefully observe that our relationship with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ is said to be "in" Them.

This is very peculiar language. No false religion says that their followers are "in Joseph Smith" or "in Muhammad" or "in Buddha" or "in Mary Baker Eddy"; because false religions have people who are following a false religion. They have no relationship with those dead frauds.

But, the believer in Jesus Christ is actually linked "in" a relationship with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a real organic union that exists and Paul is stressing that right here.

**INTRODUCTION PART #3** – The introduction of the Divine greeting . **1:2**

Now the "grace" and "peace" formula that Paul often uses sums up his theology. Grace is that undeserved, unearned, non-merited favor that God grants to us by believing on Jesus Christ. Peace refers to the peace we have with God due to His grace. Grace always comes before peace.

**Now the thing that is different here from I Thessalonians is the inclusion of the preposition “from .”** Paul wants to stress the fact that the originating, departing source of any relationship with have with Him comes from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. **That preposition tells us the church is God’s church, not our church.** The grace and peace we have experienced that enables us to form a church is from Him, not from us. **We didn’t originate the church, God did.**

Wait one day when those Mormon heretics get before Jesus Christ and try to explain how Joseph Smith and Brigham Young founded some latter day church. What a pathetic miserable lie that has satanically duped thousands of people. They had nothing to do with founding any true church.

God and His coequal Son founded the church. Carefully notice the “coordinating” conjunction “and” (καί). This is not a subordinate conjunction. This is a coordinate conjunction, which means God the Father and Jesus Christ are coequal in Deity and coequal in giving grace and peace which began the church.

God the Father and God the Son are co-sources of our grace and peace. They are coequal in Deity, they are co-jointly named as being involved in the grace and peace that we have in our relationship with God. We not only have grace and peace, we may enjoy it fully.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were coming back to Thessalonica in letter form one more time and we are going back with them.

If you would like to experience peace in your personal life and in your spiritual life, turn your life over to Jesus Christ.