

## Studies In Thessalonians #3

In addition to his universal greeting of “grace and peace” follows “we give thanks always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers ...” (1 Thess. 1:2). Only the first letter to Timothy and his letters to Titus and the Galatians have no such reference, for while these exact words are not found in Ephesians and 2 Corinthians, the idea is there. To the Ephesians he writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3) and to the Corinthians he said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort ...” (2 Cor. 1:3). Paul, like his Master, was a man much given to prayer, praying for others and his own needs and frequently soliciting others to pray for him (Rom. 15:30). And, while both his greetings and expressions of thanks are trademarks of his authorship, we are not to suppose these were empty, polite phrases: no matter how often the writer expressed them, these were his genuine, sincere thoughts for whomsoever it was he was writing: “... remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father” (1 Thess. 1:3).

Luke’s account of Paul’s work in Thessalonica tells us that for three Sabbath days he spoke in the synagogue in the city, and that his opponents were unrelenting in their opposition to him in that, at length, unbelieving Jews caused a riot in the city at which time brethren found it necessary to send Paul and Silas away to Berea (Acts 17:5-10). Still, Paul’s stay could have been over a period of months in which the animosity of unbelieving Jews grew in intensity ere it erupted in the recorded riot. We know he remained in Thessalonica long enough that on two different occasions Philippian brethren sent funds for his needs and in addition to this is Paul’s added statement of his sacrificial “working night and day” to avoid burdening the infant church with support of him (Phil. 4:15-16; 1 Thess. 1:9). So, while Paul could have been mindful of their patience of hope by Timothy’s report of them, he might have remained sufficiently long enough to have been an eyewitness of it as well.

Faith. Love. Hope. Like his universal greetings, his nearly universal expressions of thanks to God for brethren, we find Paul joining these three words together, although the passage of 1 Corinthians 13 is the most familiar. And, even when they are not found in near company to each other, the words often flowed from his pen. He remembers these brethren’s:

“Work of faith.” Contrary to common thought, Paul’s view of “saving faith” is that of a “work of faith.” “Cause and effect” (faith and obedience) are joined together to become the single word “faith”. Illustration: “Ye are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27). Luke describes their initial “work of faith” by writing “and some of them were persuaded and consorted with Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4).

“Labor of love.” The word “work” and “labor” may refer to difference in intensity: “labor” expressing a greater degree than “work”. But “work” and “labor” are not necessarily distinguished from each other by degree of intensity: the modifying word of “work” and

“labor” is perhaps the distinguishing difference: their obedience to the gospel was a work of faith; their ready yielding to Christ, a “labor of love.”

“Patience of hope.” Their patience (steadfastness) of hope was in Christ Jesus. They had believed Paul’s message to them as he “reasoned from the scriptures, opening and alleging that it behooved the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom, saith he, I proclaim unto you, is the Christ” (Acts 17:2-3). These Thessalonians steadfastly clung to the hope they had found in Christ.

Jim McDonald