

Theme: Human rebellion produces hearts of ingratitude, but the Gospel forms hearts that overflow with thankfulness - expressed to God in prayer and in verbal gratitude to others.

I. Living for Jesus In A Hostile Culture

- A. The early church lived in a culture hostile to the Gospel
- B. Many gods vs one True God; morals, especially sexual
- C. How do Christians live as we wait for Jesus to return and right all wrongs?
- D. 1 Thessalonians - Holy Waiting
- E. In the book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul encourages Christians in the midst of an ungodly culture to live in holiness as they eagerly await the return of Jesus.

II. The Background to 1 Thessalonians

- A. Thessalonica and the Gospel
 - 1. Thessalonica - capital of Macedonia & largest city
 - 2. City still exists today, the 2nd largest in Greece
 - 3. Paul went there on his 2nd missionary journey
 - 4. We read about this in Acts 17
 - 5. Some Jews and many Greeks came to Christ (v4)
 - 6. Suffered persecution in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-8)
 - a. "Turning the world upside down!"
 - b. "They say Jesus is the King! They won't get with the program!"
 - 7. They followed Paul to Berea! (v13)
 - 8. These men are hostile to the Gospel and Christians!

B. The letter of 1 Thessalonians

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

- 1. It is to this beleaguered church Paul writes
- 2. One of the earliest writings in the NT
- 3. Only Galatians is probably earlier
- 4. Here, the faith is taking hold in a pagan environment
- 5. Two key themes: eschatology & holiness
- 6. This letter shows us how to live in holiness as we await the return of Christ to establish righteousness and overcome sin and Satanic hostility to God.

III. A Holy Prayer of Thanks

A. The apostolic (team) blessing

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace to you and peace.** ² **We** give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in **our prayers**, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2

- 1. This letter is actually from the team of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, not just Paul
- 2. Also notice 'we' and 'our' (many times in the letter!)
- 3. After Hours will have more on Silvanus/Silas
- 4. Paul is certainly the leader of the team and the main author, but there is a team that labors together
- 5. Epistles usually begin with a **blessing**

6. Modeled on Greek letters, but with a Gospel twist
 - a. Greek letters began with χαίρειν - Greetings (see James 1:1)
 - b. Paul begins with χάρις - grace!
 - c. He then adds “peace” - the Jewish blessing!
 - d. The Gospel transforms everything - even our greetings to one another!
7. Even though they are facing persecution, these believers are blessed because their identity is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and their existence is marked by grace and peace!
8. This is the bedrock reality for the life of every believer!

B. The apostolic prayer for the Thessalonians

1. The apostolic team prays for the Thessalonians
We give thanks to God always for all of you, [constantly mentioning you in our prayers](#), 1 Thessalonians 1:2
 - a. The team can not be there with these persecuted believers - but they can pray, and they do so constantly!
 - b. The apostolic team is devoted to prayer!
 - c. This is an example for us - even if we can't do other things, we can always pray!
 - d. In fact, nothing is more important than prayer, for ourselves and for others.

2. Their prayer is centered on thanksgiving
[We give thanks to God always for all of you](#), constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 1 Thessalonians 1:2
 - a. We - the practice of the whole apostolic team
 - b. Always - Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians was a constant practice
 - c. God - The thanks is ultimately to God for the people
 - d. All of you - the thanks was primarily about God's work in and through the people - not 'stuff'!
 3. The Gospel should make all Christians thankful people, both for what God has done for us and the evidence of His work in others.
 4. Thankfulness should permeate the lives of believers - no matter the circumstances
Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ [give thanks in all circumstances](#); for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
 - a. Christians are called to lives of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving - regardless of the circumstances
 - b. Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving are not dependent upon external circumstances, but flow from spirits permeated by the Gospel
- #### C. A symphony of thanksgiving prayer - 3 participles
- We [give thanks](#) to God always for all of you, constantly [mentioning](#) you in our prayers, ³[remembering](#) before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we [know](#), brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you... 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4
1. Thanksgiving - [mentioning](#) you in [prayer](#)

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly **mentioning you in our prayers**, 1 Thessalonians 1:2

- a. Thanksgiving ultimately goes back to God
- b. Lack of giving thanks is a sign of unbelief and refusing to acknowledge God!

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:21

- 1. This is part of Paul's description of human rejection of God's revelation and our refusal to worship Him.
- 2. Refusal to 'give thanks to Him' is central to our rebellion!
- 3. This is one reason our culture has become so uncomfortable with thanksgiving!

- c. We should verbally give thanks to God in prayer

- 1. This should be regular practice - always, continually
- 2. When we pray, our prayers should contain thanksgiving to God
- 3. When we pray for people, we should thank God for the evidence of His work in their lives
- 4. This work includes both common and saving grace

- 2. Thanksgiving - **remembering Gospel fruit** in you **remembering** before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:3

- a. Thanksgiving requires **remembering** - reminding ourselves of God's faithfulness to us and others

- b. If I focus on negatives in others, thanksgiving withers; if I daily recount evidence of God's work in myself & others, gratitude overflows.

- c. A particular focus on the **Gospel** & its **fruit**

- 1. **Faith, love, hope** - key triad in Christian thought
- 2. **Work, labor, steadfastness** - also in Revelation 2:2 - Ephesian church commended for these (same 3 Greek words)
- 3. **Gospel root** - faith, love, & hope in Jesus Christ
- 4. **Fruit** - work, labor, endurance flow from the Gospel
- 5. **Faith, love, and hope** are internal attitudes toward Jesus
- 6. **Work, labor, & endurance** are outward actions, often expressed towards others.

- d. When we think about and pray for others, we should have a focus on the fruit of the Gospel in their lives

- e. The fruit of the Gospel in my life and the lives of those I love should produce gratitude to God

- f. The Gospel and the Spirit, which work on us in an invisible, internal manner, always produce an external, visible result.

- g. The real focus of thanksgiving here is not the external fruit as much as it is that of which the fruit evidences - the work of God's Spirit and the Gospel in the lives of these believers.

- 3. Thanksgiving - **knowing** God **loved and chose you** For we **know**, brothers **loved by God, that he has chosen you**,⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

- a. Thanksgiving includes **knowing** God's **eternal love for other believers**.
- b. Paul is simply working backwards - the Thessalonians are believers, seen in the Gospel and its fruit, evidence of God's love and election of them
- c. The same pattern as the Gospel and its fruit is evidenced here. Paul had seen the Spirit's work and the Thessalonian response, and knew the invisible reality - they had been loved and chosen by God
- d. We will look at this idea more next week

IV. Applying the Word - Holy Waiting

A. Do I practice thankfulness to God?

- 1. Paul, Silvanus, & Timothy model thankfulness for us
- 2. We are all called to lives of thankfulness
- 3. This is counter-cultural! We love to complain and focus on what is wrong!
- 4. Am I thankful for God's many blessings?
- 5. Does the Gospel give me joy and gratitude - even in tough times?
- 6. Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving are not dependent upon external circumstances, but flow from spirits permeated by the Gospel
- 7. Do I verbally express thanks to God in prayer?
- 8. Thanksgiving that is not verbally expressed is illusory; real thanksgiving finds its way into our prayers and words

B. Do I practice thanksgiving to others?

- 1. Paul almost always tells the churches why he is thankful for them

- 2. Do I regularly express thanks to people?
- 3. Do I focus on problems or things for which I am grateful in those I love and am close to?
 - a. If asked right now, can I quickly list things I am grateful for in my spouse, my kids, my family?
 - b. What about BRCC, church members, co-workers, neighbors?
 - c. If I asked them, could they more easily list your complaints or your thanks?
- 4. How often do I verbally thank those closest to me? Remember - Thanksgiving that is not verbally expressed is illusory; real thanksgiving finds its way into our prayers and words
- 5. When I pray for family and others - do I give thanks for them, or mainly pray about what needs to be 'fixed'?

C. Our Thanksgiving Table

- 1. This Table is often called "Eucharist" from the Greek word for "thanksgiving."
- 2. Here we remember Christ's work in our behalf - and give thanks! (Psalm 103:1-12 corporate reading)

A Holy Prayer of Thanks

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

May 31, 2026

Eucharist

Psalm 115:14-15

Teaching keywords: Gratitude and thanksgiving; prayer; blessing; gospel; good works; perseverance

¹⁴ May the Lord make you increase, both you and your children.

¹⁵ May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalms 115:14-15