

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul expresses gratitude and thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' faith, love, and patience, and encourages them to continue in their good works.

Scripture: Genesis 6:9, Exodus 32:32, 1 Samuel 3:1, Job 1:1, Job 42:8, Acts 5:41, Acts 17:5, Philippians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Topics: "Faith And Hope", "Holy Spirit"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches to the Church of the Thessalonians, commending their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. He emphasizes the importance of enduring afflictions with joy through the Holy Spirit, becoming examples to believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Chrysostom encourages believers to be active in virtue, not to despair or be idle, but to be vigilant and prayerful, as prayers co-operate with our own efforts. He warns against complacency and highlights the power of prayers when coupled with personal striving for righteousness.

Transcript

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you, and peace. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 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.

Wherefore then, when writing to the Ephesians, and having Timothy with him, did he not include him with himself (in his salutation), known as he was to them and admired, for he says, You know the proof of him, that as a child serves the father, so he served with me in the Gospel Philippians 2:22; and again, I have no man like-minded who will care truly for your state Philippians 2:20; but here he does associate him with himself? It seems to me, that he was about to send him immediately, and it was superfluous for him to write, who would overtake the letter. For he says, Him therefore I hope to send immediately. Philippians 2:23 But here it was not so; but he had just returned to him, so that he naturally joined in the letter. For he says, Now when Timothy came from you unto us. 1 Thessalonians 3:6 But why does he place Silvanus before him, though he testifies to his numberless good qualities, and prefers him above all? Perhaps Timothy wished and requested him to do so from his great humility; for when he saw his teacher so humble-minded, as to associate his disciple with himself, he would much the more have desired this, and eagerly sought it. For he says,

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the Church of the Thessalonians. Here he gives himself no title -- not an Apostle, not a Servant; I suppose, because the men were newly instructed, and had not yet had any experience of him, he does not apply the title; and it was as yet the beginning of his preaching to them.

To the Church of the Thessalonians, he says. And well. For it is probable there were few, and they not yet formed into a body; on this account he consoles them with the name of the Church. For where much time had passed, and the congregation of the Church was large, he does not apply this term. But because the name of the Church is for the most part a name of multitude, and of a system now compacted, on this account he calls them by that name.

In God the Father, he says, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Unto the Church of the Thessalonians, he says, which is in God. Behold again the expression, in, applied both to the Father and to the Son. For there were many assemblies, both Jewish and Grecian; but he says, to the (Church) that is in God. It is a great dignity, and to which there is nothing equal, that it is in God. God grant therefore that this Church may be so addressed! But I fear that it is far from that appellation. For if any one were the servant of sin, he cannot be said to be in God. If any one walks not according to God, he cannot be said to be in God.

Grace be unto you, and peace. Do you perceive that the very commencement of his Epistle is with encomiums? We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers. For to give thanks to God for them is the act of one testifying to their great advancement, when they are not only praised themselves, but God also is thanked for them, as Himself having done it all. He teaches them also to be moderate, all but saying, that it is all of the power of God. That he gives thanks for them, therefore, is on account of their good conduct, but that he remembers them in his prayers, proceeds from his love towards them. Then as he often does, he says that he not only remembers them in his prayers, but apart from his prayers. Remembering without ceasing, he says, your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father. What is remembering without ceasing? Either remembering before God and the Father, or remembering your labor of love that is before God and the Father, or simply, Remembering you without ceasing. Then again, that you may not think that this remembering you without ceasing is said simply, he has added, before our God and Father. And because no one among men was praising their actions, no one giving them any reward, he says this, You labor before God. What is the work of faith? That nothing has turned aside your steadfastness. For this is the work of faith. If you believe, suffer all things; if you do not suffer, thou do not believe. For are not the things promised such, that he who believes would choose to suffer even ten thousand deaths? The kingdom of heaven is set before him, and immortality, and eternal life. He therefore who believes will suffer all things. Faith then is shown through his works. Justly might one have said, not merely did you believe, but through your works you manifested it, through your steadfastness, through your zeal.

And your labor of love. Why? What labor is it to love? Merely to love is no labor at all. But to love genuinely is great labor. For tell me, when a thousand things are stirred up that would draw us from love, and we hold out against them all, is it not labor? For what did not these men suffer, that they might not revolt from their love? Did not they that warred against the Preaching go to Paul's host, and not having found him, drag Jason before the rulers of the city? Acts 17:5-6 Tell me, is this a slight labor, when the seed had not yet taken root, to endure so great a storm, so many trials? And they demanded security of him. And having given security, he says, Jason sent away Paul. Is this a small thing, tell me? Did not Jason expose himself to danger for him? And this he calls a labor of love, because they were thus bound to him.

And observe: first he mentions their good actions, then his own, that he may not seem to boast, nor yet to love them by anticipation. And patience, he says. For that persecution was not confined to one time, but was continual, and they warred not only with Paul, the teacher, but with his disciples also. For if they were thus affected towards those who wrought miracles, those venerable men; what think you were their feelings towards those who dwelt among them, their fellow citizens, who had all of a sudden revolted from them? Wherefore this also he testifies of them, saying, For you became imitators of the Churches of God which are in Judæa.

And of hope, he says, in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father. For all these things proceed from faith and hope, so that what happened to them showed not their fortitude only, but that they believed with full assurance in the rewards laid up for them. For on this account God permitted that persecutions should arise immediately, that no one might say, that the Preaching was established lightly or by flattery, and that their fervor might be shown, and that it was not human persuasion, but the power of God, that persuaded the souls of the believers, so that they were prepared even for ten thousand deaths, which would not have been the case, if the Preaching had not immediately been deeply fixed and remained unshaken.

Ver. 4, 5. Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election, how that our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; even as you know what manner of men we showed ourselves among you for your sake.

Knowing what? How we showed ourselves among you? Here he also touches upon his own good actions, but covertly. For he wishes first to enlarge upon their praises, and what he says is something of this sort. I knew that you were men of great and noble sort, that you were of the Elect. For this reason we also endure all things for your sake. For this, what manner of men we showed ourselves among you, is the expression of one showing that with much zeal and much vehemence we were ready to give up our lives for your sake; and for this thanks are due not to us, but to you, because you were elect. On this account also he says elsewhere, And these things I endure for the Elect's sake. 2 Timothy 2:10 For what would not one endure for the sake of God's beloved ones? And having spoken of his own part, he all but says, For if you were both beloved and elect, we suffer all things with reason. For not only did his praise of them confirm them, but his reminding them that they too themselves had displayed a fortitude corresponding to their zeal: he says,

Ver. 6. And you became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

Strange! What an encomium is here! The disciples have suddenly become teachers! They not only heard the word, but they quickly arrived at the same height with Paul. But this is nothing; for see how he exalts them, saying, You became imitators of the Lord. How? Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. Not merely with affliction, but with much affliction. And this we may learn from the Acts of the Apostles, how they raised a persecution against them. Acts 17:5-8 And they troubled all the rulers of the city, and they instigated the city against them. And it is not enough to say, you were afflicted indeed, and believed, and that grieving, but even rejoicing. Which also the Apostles did: Rejoicing, it is said, that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. Acts 5:41 For it is this that is admirable. Although neither is that a slight matter, in any way to bear afflictions. But this now was the part of men surpassing human nature, and having, as it were, a body incapable of suffering.

But how were they imitators of the Lord? Because He also endured many sufferings, but rejoiced. For He came to this willingly. For our sakes He emptied Himself. He was about to be spit upon, to be beaten and crucified, and He so rejoiced in suffering these things, that He said to the Father, Glorify Me. John 17:1-5

With joy of the Holy Ghost, he says. That no one may say, how do you speak of affliction? How of joy? How can both meet in one? He has added, with joy of the Holy Ghost. The affliction is in things bodily, and the joy in things spiritual. How? The things which happened to them were grievous, but not so the things which sprang out of them, for the Spirit does not allow it. So that it is possible both for him who suffers, not to rejoice, when one suffers for his sins; and being beaten to take pleasure, when one suffers for Christ's sake. For such is the joy of the Spirit. In return for the things which appear to be grievous, it brings out delight. They have afflicted you, he says, and persecuted you, but the Spirit did not forsake you, even in those circumstances. As the Three Children in the fire were refreshed with dew, so also were you refreshed in afflictions. But as there it was not of the nature of the fire to sprinkle dew, but of the whistling wind, so also here it was not of the nature of affliction to produce joy, but of the suffering for Christ's sake, and of the Spirit bedewing them, and in the furnace of temptation setting them at ease. Not merely with joy, he says, but with much joy. For this is of the Holy Spirit.

Ver. 7. So that you became ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

And yet it was later that he went to them. But you so shone, he says, that you became teachers of those who received (the word) before you. And this is like the Apostle. For he did not say, so that you became ensamples in regard to believing, but you became an ensample to those who already believed; how one ought to believe in God, you taught, who from the very beginning entered into your conflict.

And in Achaia, he says; that is, in Greece.

Do you see how great a thing is zeal? That it does not require time, nor delay, nor procrastination, but it is sufficient only to venture one's self, and all is fulfilled. Thus then though coming in later to the Preaching, they became teachers of those who were before them.

Moral . Let no one therefore despair, even though he has lost much time, and has done nothing. It is possible for him even in a little while to do so much, as he never has done in all his former time. For if he who before did not believe, shone so much at the beginning, how much more those who have already believed! Let no one, again, upon this consideration be remiss, because he perceives that it is possible in a short time to recover everything. For the future is uncertain, and the Day of the Lord is a thief, setting upon us suddenly when we are sleeping. But if we do not sleep, it will not set upon us as a thief, nor carry us off unprepared. For if we watch and be sober, it will not set upon us as a thief, but as a royal messenger, summoning us to the good things prepared for us. But if we sleep, it comes upon us as a thief. Let no one therefore sleep, nor be inactive in virtue, for that is sleep. Do you not know how, when we sleep, our goods are not in safety, how easy they are to be plotted against? But when we are awake, there needs not so much guarding. When we sleep, even with much guarding we often perish. There are doors, and bolts, and guards, and outer guards, and the thief has come upon us.

Why then do I say this? Because, if we wake we shall not need the help of others; but if we sleep, the help of others will profit us nothing, but even with this we perish. It is a good thing to enjoy the prayer of the Saints, but it is when we ourselves also are on the alert. And what need, you say, have I of another's prayer, if I am on the alert myself. And in truth, do not place yourself in a situation to need it; I do not wish that you should; but we are always in need of it, if we think rightly. Paul did not say, what need have I of

prayer? And yet those who prayed were not worthy of him, or rather not equal to him; and you say, what need have I of prayer? Peter did not say, What need have I of prayer, for prayer, it says, was made earnestly of the Church unto God for him. Acts 12:5 And you say, What need have I of prayer? On this account you need it, because you think that you have no need. Yea, though thou become as Paul, you have need of prayer. Do not exalt yourself, lest you be humbled.

But, as I said, if we be active also ourselves, the prayers for us avail too. Hear Paul saying, For I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your supplication, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:19 And again, That for the gift bestowed upon us by means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf. 2 Corinthians 1:11 And you say, what need have I of prayer? But if we are idle, no one will be able to profit us. What did Jeremiah profit the Jews? Did he not thrice draw near to God, and the third time hear, Pray not for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer, for I will not hear you? Jeremiah 7:16 What did Samuel profit Saul? Did he not mourn for him even to his last day, and not merely pray for him only? What did he profit the Israelites? Did he not say, God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you? 1 Samuel 12:23 Did they not all perish? Do prayers then, you say, profit nothing? They profit even greatly: but it is when we also do something. For prayers indeed coöperate and assist, but a man coöperates with one that is operating, and assists one that is himself also working. But if you remain idle, you will receive no great benefit.

For if prayers had power to bring us to the kingdom while we do nothing, why do not all the Greeks become Christians? Do we not pray for all the world? Did not Paul also do this? Do we not intreat that all may be converted? Why do not the wicked become good without contributing anything of themselves? Prayers, then, profit greatly, when we also contribute our own parts.

Would you learn how much prayers have profited? Consider, I pray, Cornelius, Tabitha. Acts 10:3 and 9:36 Hear also Jacob saying to Laban, Except the Fear of my father had been with me, surely you had now sent me away empty. Genesis 31:42 Hear also God again, saying, I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake. 2 Kings 9:34 But when? In the time of Hezekiah, who was righteous. Since if prayers availed even for the extremely wicked, why did not God say this also when Nebuchadnezzar came, and why did He give up the city? Because wickedness availed more. Again, Samuel himself also prayed for the Israelites, and prevailed. But when? When they also pleased God, then they put their enemies to flight. And what need, you say, of prayer from another, when I myself please God? Never, O man, say this. There is need, aye, and need of much prayer. For hear God saying concerning the friends of Job; And he shall pray for you, and your sin shall be forgiven you. Job 42:8 Because they had sinned indeed, but not a great sin. But this just man, who then saved his friends by prayer, in the season of the Jews was not able to save the Jews who were perishing. And that you may learn this, hear God saying through the prophet; If Noah, Daniel, and Job stood, they shall not deliver their sons and their daughters. Ezekiel 14:14-16 Because wickedness prevailed. And again, Though Moses and Samuel stood. Jeremiah 15:1

And see how this is said to the two Prophets, because both prayed for them, and did not prevail. For Ezekiel says, Ah Lord, do you blot out the residue of Israel? Ezekiel 9:8 Then showing that He does this justly, He shows him their sins; and showing that not through despising him does He refuse to accept his supplication for them, he says, Even these things are enough even to persuade you, that not despising you, but on account of their many sins, I do not accept your supplication. Nevertheless He adds, Though. Noah, Job, and Daniel stood. From Ezekiel 14 And with good reason does He the rather say this to him, because it is he who suffered so many things. You bade me, he says, eat upon dung, and I ate upon it.

You bade me, and I shaved my head. You bade me, and I lay upon one side. You bade me go out through a hole in the wall, bearing a burden, and I went out. You took away my wife, and bade me not mourn, and I did not mourn, but bore it with fortitude. Ezekiel 24:18 Ten thousand other things have I wrought for their sake: I entreat for them, and dost Thou not comply? Not from despising you, says he, do I do this, but though Noah, Job, and Daniel were there, and were entreating for sons and daughters, I would not comply.

And again to Jeremiah, who suffered less from the commandments of God, but more from their wickedness, what does He say? Do you see not what these do? Jeremiah 7:17 Yea, he says, they do so -- but do Thou do it for my sake. On this account He says to him, Though Moses and Samuel stood. Their first lawgiver, who often delivered them from dangers, who had said, If now you forgive their sins, forgive it; but if not, blot me out also. Exodus 32:32, Septuagint If therefore he were now alive, and spoke thus, he would not have prevailed -- nor would Samuel, again, who himself also delivered them, and who from his earliest youth was admired. For to the former indeed I said, that I conversed with him as a friend with a friend, and not by dark sayings. And of the latter I said, that in his first youth I was revealed to him, and that on his account, being prevailed upon, I opened the prophecy that had been shut up. For the word of the Lord, it is said, was precious in those days; there was no open vision. 1 Samuel 3:1 If these men, therefore, stood before Me, they would profit nothing. And of Noah He says, Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations. Genesis 6:9 And concerning Job, He was blameless, just, true, fearing God. Job 1:1, Septuagint And concerning Daniel, whom they even thought a God; and they will not deliver, says he, their sons and daughters. Knowing these things, therefore, let us neither despise the prayers of the Saints, nor throw everything upon them: that we may not, on the one hand, be indolent and live carelessly; nor on the other deprive ourselves of a great advantage. But let us both beseech them to pray and lift up the hand for us, and let us adhere to virtue; that we may be able to obtain the blessings promised to those who love Him by the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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