

# 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

## 1. Intro

- a. If you were to write a letter of recommendation for revolve, or if you were to brag about what God is doing in our little church family, what would your list look like? As an elder or leader, what do you want to see in our church fam?
  - b. Put another way, how does God evaluate a church vs. how does the world evaluate a church's success or health?
    - i. We value things like: elaborately staged and executed worship services, political awareness, social prominence and influence, size of congregation, budget, number of baptisms recorded each year.
    - ii. These things may have value, but are the the rubrics by which God evaluates a church? Does he evaluate based on external features or something else?
  - c. Here is the situation surrounding 2 Thessalonians:
    - i. We just finished 1 Thess and Paul probably wrote this just a few months after his first letter
    - ii. He was still in Corinth when he received a report about how the church and their circumstance had changed
    - iii. Apparently, as we will see, the church had responded well to Paul's first letter. His letter is filled with encouragement for applying the things that had taught.
    - iv. That said, it seems that persecution ramped up as the church grew and matured.
    - v. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to deal with 3 main things:
      1. Persecution had increased so he wants to encouragement to persevere
      2. Despite his time in the city and his follow up letter, there is still a great deal of confusion surrounding future events
      3. Practically some people had come to believe that Jesus' return was so imminent that they might as well stop working
  - d. Paul's going to begin this first section of his letter with a word of encouragement. Primarily, our big idea is that: "Growing in faith, love, and hope in the midst of the best of times and the worst of times is evidence of God's righteousness at work in you"
2. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering...

- a. Paul is writing alongside Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, the couriers who brought his previous letter and got a report back from the church
  - b. He says, “we ought to give thanks,” but in the KJV it rightly says, “we are bound to give thanks.”
    - i. I think that carries a bit more weight. The idea isn’t just that we should be thankful but that we are compelled, obligated to give thanks. I realize that is a nuance, but I think it is important
      - 1. For someone like me, thankfulness doesn’t come naturally. I need to remember that I am obligated to be thankful, not as a law but as a reality of my life.
        - a. A lack of thankfulness isn’t because I am not disciplined enough to be thankful, but because I am blind to God’s grace and mercy at work in my life and the people around me.
        - b. Had I eyes to see, I would be bound to give thanks!
  - c. The reason for Paul’s thanks is that he observes growth in three main areas: a growing faith, an increasing brotherly love, and calm patience in the midst of persecution (e.g. steadfast hope)
    - i. Those are reasons for celebration for sure (and we are going to talk more about them), but I want you to quickly notice that this exactly what Paul had prayed for in 1 Thessalonians
      - 1. 1 Thess 3:12-13, “...may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as well for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”
    - ii. Important: God does answer prayers. What kind of prayers? Prayers in line w/ his will. Sometimes I think we focus so much on praying for what we want we forget to pray for what God wants.
      - 1. When was the last time I prayed that we would grow in faith, love, and hope? Normally I just pray for a building, for wisdom about students, etc.
      - 2. Maybe I should pray more for things clearly revealed in God’s Word - maybe you should too.
  - d. The growth of their faith, love, and hope in difficult times is manifest evidence of God’s work in their lives.
    - i. This is the pattern set by every godly person in the Bible and clearly seen in Jesus and in Paul as well.
    - ii. Difficulties and suffering are crucial that we may be considered worthy of the kingdom.
      - 1. It is through trials and difficulties that we enter the kingdom of God
3. Growing in faith, love, and hope in the midst of the best of times and the worst of times is evidence of God’s righteousness at work in you.
- a. In order to really grasp this, we need to define what it means to grow in each of these core areas.

- b. Paul writes these things so that the Thessalonians can be confident and encouraged. If you want to be encouraged by God's work in you (and the genuineness of your faith), then you need to know these things too.
- c. The difficulty is that our rubric for measurement is all backwards. This is Paul's framework. This is how he evaluates the basics of what are the most important.
- d. Also important to note is that these things are scaleable. You never finish growing in each of these areas, but you also can normally only see the growth in hindsight.
- e. To grow in faith means to take increasing advantage of the access that we have to the presence of God.
  - i. I spent the most time asking God what it means to grow in faith
  - ii. While I was praying on this, I happened to read in my QT Hebrews 10
  - iii. Hebrews 10:19-25, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us** draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And **let us** consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
  - iv. I think you see a parallel here of faith, hope, and love
  - v. To grow in faith, according to Hebrews, is to draw near w/ a true heart.
    - 1. In other words, to grow in faith is to abide, to thirst for righteousness, to hunger for God, to pursue his presence, to grow in faith
    - 2. These are spiritual disciplines or spiritual vitality - growing in faith, prayer, the Word, fasting, etc
    - 3. As you need to eat and drink to live, you need to eat and drink (Word and Spirit) to live spiritually
  - vi. Are you growing in this area? In Proverbs 2 we see a great description of this using action words like seek, long, call out for, search for like treasure, pursue — is that how you chase after God's wisdom and presence?
- f. To grow in love is to joyfully live out the "one another's" in Christian community.
  - i. Hebrews 10 describes it as meeting together in corporate community so we can stay accountable and encouraged.
  - ii. We need one another for these two reasons
    - 1. Without accountability to the Christian community we inevitably compromise on holiness
      - a. Even if it isn't a choosing of some big sin, we grow lazy in the pursuit of "new areas of holiness"

- b. There are some struggles I don't see in myself until I see the holiness of God in a brother or sister
      - c. This is why marriage helps us to grow!
    - 2. Without encouragement you inevitably lose steam
      - a. Trials are difficult, sometimes you are under attack. Share story of Moses and the battle where he had to hold his staff.
        - i. We need someone to hold our arms as we grow tired
      - 3. Podcasts, YouTube clips, and streaming do not provide you with accountability or encouragement. Only community can provide those things.
  - iii. Are you growing in your love for one another? Do you love the church (not the world, the church) more today than you did a year ago? Do you love God's people with increasing affection and desire to help them grow in Christlikeness?
- g. To grow in hope is to see increased patience and steadfastness in the midst of trials of all kinds.
  - i. Airport Mode Billy
  - ii. Greece
  - iii. Van
  - iv. Camping, raining, CRV
  - v. Philippians 2:14-16, Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.
    - 1. This kind of attitude represents a calm heart that trusts in God's sovereignty despite hardship, annoyance, illness, and all the multitude of things that happen.
    - 2. If we can learn to grow in HOPE in the small things, we will be more equipped to trust him in the big things.
  - vi. In Hebrews 10, more seriously, hope is holding on to our faith even when things get difficult
    - 1. This is more what Paul has in mind in 2 Thess as we will see shortly
    - 2. We will see in chapter 2 that a great falling away (apostasy) will precede Christ's return
    - 3. Paul is essentially encouraging the Thessalonians by saying, "I see you hanging on! There are better things for you!"
  - vii. Are you growing in hope? Are you less likely to panic and grow anxious than you were a year or two ago? Do you feel more confident in your faith and Jesus or less? What do you need to grow in steadfast hope despite hardship?

#### 4. CONCLUSION

- a. Growing in faith, love, and hope in the midst of the best of times and the worst of times is evidence of God's righteousness at work in you.
- b. These areas are the primary ways that we should be evaluating ourselves and our church. These are the things we should be praying for. If we grow in these areas, we will bear fruit in every area!
- c. We may be impressed with numbers, buildings, budgets, production, and social media influencers, but that's not really what matters. What matters, Paul says in 1 Corinthians, is faith, hope, and love - and the greatest of these is love.
- d. We grow in our faith today - drawing near to God.
- e. We grow in our hope - clinging to what we know and have come to believe is true despite hardship
- f. We grow in our love - treating one another w/ the love of Christ, loving one another as a family, cherishing one another like our own body
- g. Let us pray to that end for ourselves and for one another.
- h. Growth in these areas is the true evidence of God at work (v5).

#### TABLE TALK:

- In which of the areas mentioned today (faith, love, & hope) do you feel like you have seen the most growth? Why?
- Where do you feel the weakest? Why?
- What do you think you need from God and from your Christian community in order to grow in your area of weakness?
- Who can you share this desire for growth with so that you can have prayer, accountability, and encouragement?