

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

–A. W. Tozer

Differences in the openings of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians arise from differing circumstances and purposes in the letters. Yet they also reveal truths about God which should come to mind, when we think on Him. Since writing his first letter a few months earlier, previous issues in the church had grown which Paul will address in this letter: increased persecution, false teaching, and a failure of some to work. So he wrote to encourage, instruct, and exhort. He begins the letter typically with thanks and in anticipation of the later contents, but also with insights into the person of God.

1. The addition of “our” in “the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father” points to the familial relationship of believers to God. ***God is our heavenly Father.***
 - a. God is the Father of the persecuted, caring for them, rewarding them, and judging those who persecute them (ch. 1).
 - b. God is the Father of the fearful, whether or not their fears are founded, He desires to encourage them (ch. 2).
 - c. God is the Father even of the disobedient children, disciplining them (ch. 3; cf. Hebrews 12).
2. The addition of “ought” in “we ought always to thank God for you” says that thanks are owed to God. ***God is worthy of and owed thanksgiving.***
 - a. God was owed thanks because God had answered prayer.
Their prayer for the Thessalonians for stronger faith and increased love (1 Thess 3:9–13) had been answered.
 - b. God was owed thanks because it was God who had worked this faith and love in them.
Paul had acknowledged that already in 1 Thessalonians 4:9 and implied it by requesting God for it. Therefore, they “rightly so” owed thanks.

Remember to thank God, because all which we have, we have received from Him. Thank Him for answered prayer. He is not obligated to us. We are obligated to Him to thank Him.

3. The addition of “growing” and “increasing” in the description of their already present faith and love (1 Thess 1:3; 3:6–7) points to their spiritual growth and maturing as believers. ***God desires and works spiritual growth.***
 - a. God had strengthened their faith to withstand increased persecutions and trials (v. 4).
 - b. God had increased their love for one another to obey the commands which Paul had given (3:4) and never tire of doing what was right (3:13).
They were comforting, encouraging, respecting, warning, helping, being patient, and being kind to one another as they had been commanded (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11–15).

Pray in accordance with what God desires. Since God desires spiritual growth, ask Him for that in your life and the life of others.
4. The addition that Paul, Silas, and Timothy themselves now boasted about the Thessalonians’ perseverance and faith pointed to their confidence in God’s grace to enable believers (cf. 2 Cor 8:1–5). ***God’s grace is abundantly sufficient, even in persecutions and trials, and He is therefore especially worthy of praise.***
 - a. God’s grace was provided in their circumstances: “all the persecutions and trials.”
Opposition from spiritual enemies came at different times and in different ways and may have resulted in further stress and injury. But God’s grace was sufficient.
 - b. God’s grace was revealed in their response of perseverance and faith.
They bore up and kept on, remaining loyal to Jesus and not wavering in their trust in Him.

Encourage fellow believers in hardship by pointing them to a faithful, loving heavenly Father who is working all things to their good, whose grace is always sufficient. Brag on what God does in His children to His glory.

What comes to your mind when you think about God? Don’t let the thinking of the world distort your view of God. Think as Paul thought, God is our heavenly Father to whom we owe our thanks because He desires and produces our spiritual growth by His all-sufficient grace even in extreme difficulties.