

**Introduction****1 Thessalonians 1:1**

According to Acts 16, Paul met up with Timothy while on his second journey in the area of Derbe and Lystra in modern-day Turkey. It's possible that Timothy became a believer when Paul visited three or four years earlier on his first missionary journey (1 Timothy 1:2). Silvanus (Silas) was a prominent member of the Hebrew church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22) and a prophet (Acts 15:32) and was chosen to deliver a decree agreed upon at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:20). These three continued on to Corinth to minister to them (1 Corinthians 1:19). There is a good possibility that Paul wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians from Corinth having settled there for 18 months (Acts 18:11).

Although Jesus Christ revealed this new Gospel of Grace directly to Paul (Galatians 1:12) it was the Holy Spirit who revealed it to the other apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:3—5). This new Gospel was merely a revelation of a change in how God intended to deal with man. He was no longer going to go through Israel to reach the world but is now treating all men as equal. When God was dealing with Israel all Gentiles (non-Jews) needed to go through Israel to meet God. That is no longer the case (Ephesians 2:11—13). It's important to understand why Paul often says "but now" when speaking of the change from Israel's Prophetic program to our Mystery program (see Romans 3:21; 7:6; 16:26; Colossians 1:26).

**Grace and Peace**

Every Pauline epistle contains the salutation of grace and peace. This phrase is not just a catchy, pleasant greeting. Paul isn't using this to be friendly but attributes God as bestowing grace and peace on the believers of Thessalonica. This greeting is also closely related to the new Dispensation of Grace as revealed through Paul. Under Kingdom preaching (beginning with John and continuing into early Acts—see Luke 16:16), came the announcement that the Millennial Kingdom was right around the corner. The next steps in the prophetic timeline are the seven-year Tribulation followed by the Second coming and then the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom. With national Israel's rejection of the Kingdom came a change in God's plans (From our view it appeared to be a change. From God's view, it was planned from eternity past. See Ephesians 1:4). Because of Christ's work on the cross we can now have peace with the Father and peace between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14). God's imminent judgment on the world was temporally averted and mankind was given more time to decide to follow Christ.

Law and Grace are opposite of each other as are peace and war (Romans 6:14—15). God was going to declare war on this godless world and pour out His wrath but instead there came a declaration of peace. As Ephesians 2:14—15 says, Christ IS our peace all because He, working on God's behalf, reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). In this age of grace God is quietly allowing man to stray far from Him but in so doing, man is storing up wrath against the day of wrath when He will dish out to all men according to their deeds (Romans 2:5—6). However, man is now benefitting from God's mercy and grace because God desires for all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

**Church in God and in Christ**

Paul lays out the position of these believers in this first verse. They are the church (assembly), which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is true for all believers in this Dispensation of Grace (1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:2, 27; 3:3). At the point of salvation we are placed in Christ and since we are in Christ we are also in the Father. This speaks of an absolute eternal security.

It doesn't stop there for Scripture also tells us Christ is in each believer (Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 1:27). This is unique to the members of the Body of Christ and is the hope of our future with Him. According to the Romans passage those who are indwelt by the Spirit are those who have Christ in them. Our future hope is based on the Spirit raising Jesus Christ from the dead. We who have the Holy Spirit are assured that those who are dead in Christ will be raised to life, just as Jesus was.

The Holy Spirit has a special ministry to the members of the church, the Body of Christ. Ephesians 1 is a wonderful chapter that lists the spiritual blessings of a believer. It is by Christ's great love and abundant grace that He shed blood so that we would have redemption and therefore forgiveness of our sins. He has also given us His Holy Spirit to guarantee that He will do what He promised, giving us an eternal inheritance. The Holy Spirit is not given and taken away depending upon how we act or what we do for Ephesians 4:30 clearly states that the Holy Spirit will remain with us until the day we are ultimately redeemed.

There is some confusion about this redemption for most of us understand that we who are saved have already been redeemed. Hebrews 9:12 says this redemption was accomplished when Jesus died on the cross and we obtained it when we believed. Since Jesus Christ is the perfect, sinless sacrifice, this redemption is eternal. So how is it if we are already redeemed that the Rapture is called the Day of Redemption?

This conundrum can be understood by realizing the Holy Spirit is a down payment for what we will obtain in the future (Ephesians 1:13—14). He is like earnest money paid when making an offer on some real estate. The down payment guarantees a future transaction. Our future was paid for by Jesus' death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit guarantees the completion of the salvation transaction. The completion of this transaction is detailed in 1 Corinthians 15:54

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

### **Kingdom believers are also in Christ**

Paul often emphasizes that we are in Christ, however, Peter and John also mention that they are in Christ. Paul also talks of those who were in Christ before he was. Dispensationally, Paul's term has a different focus than Peter and John's usage of this same term. Paul is writing to members of the Body of Christ while Peter and John are writing to those saved under the Gospel of the Kingdom. The books they wrote (1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John and Revelation) are all concerned with the Hebrew believer (or Kingdom believer or those of the circumcision). This splitting of duties between the disciples of the Kingdom and Paul was decided upon at the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 and the agreement to split duties between those of the circumcision and uncircumcision is laid out in Galatians 7:7.

Peter and John's use of the term "in Christ" can be applied to all who have believed. All believers from every age need to be "in Christ" in order to enjoy an eternity with Him. It is through Christ's shed blood that makes it possible for a sinner to become pure, ready to meet the Father. Those who reject the Son will not be "in Christ" and therefore will not be able to spend an eternity in the Kingdom or heaven.

Paul uses "in Christ" to describe the believer's position. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 we who are in Christ have become new creatures and Galatians 3:28 tells us there is no longer any distinction between Jews and Gentiles (as there was under the Dispensation of Law) but we are now all one in Christ Jesus.

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