

Unsung Heroes
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2 Thess 1:1

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(NCV)

Παῦλος καὶ Σίλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος	From Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων	To the church in Thessalonica
ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν	in God our Father
καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ	and the Lord Jesus Christ

See “ecclesiastic” in line 2’s *ekklesia*. Thessalonica, God, Father, Lord, Jesus, and Christ, can all be recognized by inspection. In fact, the vocabulary of the whole verse is almost readable with no Greek at all.

But there is one nuance that only a student of Greek will know. Line 1’s three names are all in the nominative case, so they are equally the subject of the sentence with Paul. So who sent the letter? It says right there, in line 1, that the letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. (Of course, Paul is their leader and chiefly responsible.)

I suggest that you [take a look](#) at Randolph Richards’ 2004 book, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*. He claims that writing needs good eyes, so in Paul’s time it was the province of the young. And lighting was best outdoors. Life was busy and letters were written on the move.

Richards says that we tend to picture Paul anachronistically: pen in hand, in a secluded room with a desk, whose first drafts were perfect with no need of proofing or rewrite, banging them out swiftly in response to some crisis, with no significant contribution by his understudies. Thus the letters are exclusively Pauline.

But that's not what it says! Look at the verse! And in the following verses Paul speaks for the group more than once, "We must always thank God for you," "we brag about you," "We tell them," "we always pray for you," "We pray all this," "we have something to say about the coming of the Lord." He doesn't speak as an individual apostle until chapter 2.

In addition, Paul did not personally and physically write down most (if any) of his letters. He used secretaries. He wrote a little at the end of 1 Corinthians in his own hand, sort of like signing it (16:21). See also Gal 6:11, Col 4:18, 2 Thess 3:17, and Philemon 19. (Who wrote Romans? See 16:22.)

I think most of us naively imagine Paul dictating to someone like a stenographer, who precisely transcribed every word. But a typical secretary was more like what we call a ghost writer or speech writer—or editor—who wrote down the general ideas and notes of the "author" on tablets, then put them into readable form with his own contributions and style. (Of course, the originator approved it before it was sent—and was responsible for its content.)

How far did this go? One of every three words in the Pastorals are not found elsewhere in Paul. Think about that. Can you write a lengthy email such that a third of your vocabulary you hadn't used in previous emails? I bet you can't. That's the conundrum; the Pastorals seem especially collaborative with Paul's peeps, whoever they were. See 2 Tim 4:13, 4:21, and Tit 3:15.

Think of all the invisible people whose efforts the Spirit used to providentially secure for us the biblical books. Who carried Paul's letter to the Galatians? Who edited the Law for later readers (Gen 35:6; Exod 38:26; etc.)?

Baruch transcribed Jeremiah's words (Jer 36:4), but who wrote down Isaiah's (Isa 8:16)?

Most of the scribes who preserved and transmitted the Old Testament are unknown. The same goes for the medieval monks who transmitted your New Testament. God's kingdom is filled with essential nobodies, who give their lives to the work of the gospel, but who remain anonymous. This is a biblical principle, as Paul and Sosthenes wrote, "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor 1:26 – 27a).

For every tall steeple preacher there are scores of faithful pastors and elders—perhaps you are one—laboring away in relative obscurity. Perhaps you are a Tertius, or a Gaius, or a Claudia, or a Silvanus. When all is said and done, the efforts of modest people like you will prove to be essential to God's plan. Who cares if your church is small? Who cares if no one outside your tiny circle knows your name? God has put you there. Your people look to you. And when Jesus returns, your faithfulness will shine like the sun. So don't get distracted by others' notoriety. The only one you should compare yourself to is Jesus.

Something to think about.