

Church Health 101(Part 2)

Առողջ Եկեղեցույ Նշանները

1 Thessalonians 1

We started two weeks ago a series of sermons about Paul's 1st letter to the Thessalonians. This 1st chapter is a good introduction that gives the marks of a healthy church, and we will call it Church Health 101.

This is a letter of encouragement and self examination. Paul is encouraged by this newly established church (Acts 16-17). Paul looks back and thanks God for them. He has heard that God was indeed working among them as the Word of the gospel was preached. It was not an accident that they had become Christians. God's Spirit was working in them. They were chosen by God (v.4) to be a light in the world around them in Northern Greece¹.

The letter has two folds:

First: the role of Paul, Slias and Timothy, which means the leadership of the church including the pastors, the council, the deacons and the elders.

We examined last week the role of leadership:

1. Having a Life of Prayer
2. Proclaiming the Gospel
3. Becoming an example

Second: the role of the congregation

The key verse for congregation is verse 3. Paul prays for **the spiritual maturity, for the spiritual strength, for the spiritual growth of the church.** The evidence is verse 3.

remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:3 ESV)

Faith that produces work, Labor of **Christ's love**, NIV translates, "**your labor prompted by love**"; and **endurance**, steadfastness *hypomonē* (under pressure) of **hope**. Faith, Hope and Love... or **Salvation, Service, and Steadfastness, Hypomone...**

1. FAITH that Produces work

This is exactly what James mentions in his letter. So many misunderstood this verse:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (James 2:14 ESV)

James puts his finger on the spot. "What good is for someone says he believes...he has faith...yet he does not have works." If you ask me, just words...words and words without life. Both Paul and James believe that this kind of faith will not save the person.

Paul says in Ephesians:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)

Let us continue the following verses:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, (Ephesians 2:10a ESV)

We are called to be God's workmanship, we are God's partners in working, serving, caring, loving. We are God's poetry... what do I mean?

The Greek word is *poiēma*...The word poem comes from this word. We are God's poem... Some versions translate it as masterpiece, handiwork, creation.

Why did God create us? **We are His workmanship**. We work **with Him**. We work **for Him**. We work **because of Him**. We are because we are created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Let us clarify one thing. Our salvation is by faith. **We're not saved by works; we're saved unto good works.** There is no saving faith that doesn't work. Paul says, "**I am thankful to God for your faith that produces work.**"

This is an essential sign of a healthy church. We are not gathered for social entertainment, or because we happen to be created in a certain ethnicity Armenian, American... A faith that produces work is productive and healthy.

-James too is stressing this point further by giving an example of faith that produces fruit.

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:15-17 ESV)

Illustration: A few years ago, someone from my congregation lost his job. He had a big family to support. We were all concerned for him because months went on without any success. They had no income. That summer, husband and wife with 2 of their teenage kids came to help in our VBS. At the end of the week, we decided to give them a gas station gift card to cover their cost of gas since their home was 40 miles away. Before we even gave them the gift card, the director of VBS gave me an envelope with a generous donation to VBS from this family. I was speechless. Now that's faith that produces fruit.

-Another evidence for genuine faith is **turning away from idols to the living God,**

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (1 Thessalonians 1:9 ESV)

It is not an easy one. In Thessalonica, they literally had idols they worshiped. These days in Fresno, how do you identify an idol?

Here are two good definitions of idols:

“Idols are created things that replace God as our source of significance, security, identity and worth.”

“Any idol is something we TRUST in, and we also LOVE and SERVE with our resources, time, energy and thoughts.”

So ask yourself, do I have any idols that are taking the place of God in my life?

- Money
- A Good Reputation
- Academic Achievement
- Good Looks
- Religious Skills!!!

But the key of the success of the church of Thessalonica is their turning to the LIVING God. Two Sundays ago I did mention Paul’s greeting. To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and **the Lord Jesus Christ:** (1 Thessalonians 1:1 ESV)

Living IN God, Living IN Christ, Living IN Jesus. Those words means their mind, soul, spirit is in God. Their life is surrendered to God. An intimate genuine faith that produces a genuine life, not a fake one.

2. Serving God with LOVE

Labor of Christ’s love, NIV translates, **“your labor prompted (driven) by love”**;

how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (1 Thessalonians 1:9 ESV)

This means Paul is saying, “Your faith in Christ is so enormous, that it appears in your works, it appears in your turning away from your idols; it appears in your service. You serve God in love. Your labor promoted (driven) by LOVE.”

The word in Greek that Paul uses in verse 9 to serve the living God”, is ***douleuō***. It means : to be a slave, serve, do service. Paul uses this word to describe himself. Paul, *doulos* of Jesus Christ.

“Paul, a **servant (slave) (doulos)** of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (Romans 1:1)

It was an honor for Paul to be a servant, a slave of Christ. It was like we say Dr. this or Rev. that; it was Paul’s and the disciples’ title, to be a *doulos* of Christ.

-Every time when I am discouraged or tired of serving God, or by not being recognized by anyone...I remind myself I am a servant of God. I serve driven by His Love, with His Love, through His Love. I am in His service....

Because of the Thessalonians’ service in love, they have become examples to other churches. **You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.** (1 Thessalonians 1:7 ESV) **In other words, “you became a model church; you became the pattern to follow.”**

-Their testimony was declared **like a trumpet’s sound that was loud and was being heard all over.**

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, (1:8)

Sounded forth in Greek is *kataggellō* : to announce, declare, promulgate, make known, to proclaim publicly, publish...

Two Sundays ago we mentioned that the role of the **leadership** is to model Christ. Today I am saying that modeling continues from leadership to the **congregation**. And from congregation to other congregations...

Their faith was genuine; their service was driven by Christ’s love.

Illustration: Merchants Luncheon in coming up... I see in the kitchen when men or women cook. We do it with love. We serve each other with love. We call each other, sometimes we drive each other, we go to eat together, we pray for each other...

3. Endurance, steadfastness of HOPE in Christ Jesus.

Endurance, steadfastness *hypomonē* (under pressure) of hope.

Our hope is Jesus Christ. Our hope is imminent and futuristic. Imminent because Jesus Christ is with us today though the Holy Spirit, yet futuristic because we wait for his Second Coming when our hope will be fulfilled.

That is our hope. Meanwhile, we learn to endure hardship. The word is in Greek is *hypomone* (under pressure.) Like the athlete who carries weight, up and down. His muscles become stronger. He continues going up and down. Then they add more weight, and he continues to go up and down. Remember Paul says they were persecuted.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, (1 Thessalonians 1:6 ESV)

They were persecuted by the local Jewish community. They were persecuted by some wicked men of the rabble, like a mob. (Acts 17).

The church did not give up under pressure. In fact, it became stronger and continued to fix their eyes on Christ, their only HOPE.

Application:

For a moment let's pretend Paul visited Pilgrim Church. What would be his letter to us?

-How are you doing this morning in these three areas, Faith, Love and steadfast Hope?

-Does your life indicate those values? Are you ashamed of the Gospel?

Do you have faith that God is here and can hold you and help you to move one in your life and helps you to find meaning in your life? Do you have faith? How big is your God? How big is your faith?

-Do not ask God to give you more faith. It does not work that way. Come on your knees and surrender to Him. Be in relationship with Him. He will strengthen your faith. The faith that produces works, the faith that labors in love; the faith that helps you to stand firm in steadfast hope under the pressures of life.

Amen

1. NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone, Thessalonians* P 88

These questions came via email this week in my quiet time. It is interesting that I am working on my sermon and those questions challenged me. I hope it will challenge you:

- When I ask you, “What’s your goal for your health?” and you say, “I don’t have one,” then your goal is to stay the same.
- When I ask you, “What’s your goal in your relationships?” and you say, “I don’t have one,” then your goal is for them not to get any better.
- When I ask you, “What’s your goal for your finances and getting out of debt?” and you say, “I don’t have one,” then your goal is to stay in debt.
- When I ask you, “What’s your goal for your business career?” and you say, “I don’t have one,” then your goal is to just drift along.
- How do your goals reveal how much you trust God to do big things in your life?
- In what area have you neglected to set a goal?
- What goal will you set today so that you are continually growing in every area of your life?