

Church Health 101

Վարակիչ Եկեղեցւոյ Նշանները

1 Thessalonians 1

“I have a dream” (Martin Luther King). “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself” (Franklin D. Roosevelt). Եկեղեցին Հայկական Ծննդավայրն է Հոգւոյս (Վահան Թէքէեան) “The Armenian Church is the birthplace of my soul” (Vahan Takayan). Վասն Քրիստոսի, Վասն Հայրենեաց (Վարդան Մամիկոնեան) For Christ and for the Nation (Vartan Mamigonian). Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words (St. Francis of Assisi). “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country” (John F. Kennedy).

Words and sentences we heard and learned and each word brings memories to us, to me. There is power in the word. How about the Word of God that we read, learn, meditate on, memorize, pray and study?

Lent season is over. Passion Week, done. Easter morning already is in the backseat. **We are back to normal life. As your pastors, Kevin’s and my role is to continue feeding you from the Word of God.** We spent time reading, praying and asking God to lead us in teaching you. In October I started challenging you to find your role in ministry to PROCLAIM HIS message. The Lord’s Prayer sermon sires emphasized the role of prayer in our ministry. Without prayer nothing we can do. We move on to a new series on the letter of 1st Thessalonians. I think this letter will be encouraging us to continue life after resurrection. What is next? What is the impact of the risen Lord on the community of believers? Here is one such community, the church in Thessalonica.

This chapter is a good introduction **to the marks of a healthy church**, which we will call **Healthy Church 101.**

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, (1:1a)

Paul starts the letter by mentioning two disciples of his: Silvanus and Timothy. **Silvanus** is **Silas** (Acts 15) the disciple who accompanied Barnabas and Paul on three mission trips. He is a Jewish member of the Jerusalem church and also Roman citizen.¹ He is also the disciple who accompanied Paul when Barnabas and Paul split (Acts 15). **Timothy** is also one of Paul's faithful disciples. "Timothy, of Lystra in south Galatia, was a son of a Jewish mother and Greek father and became partners with Paul when Paul passed through his hometown early on his second journey."(Acts 16)²

To the church of the Thessalonians (which is) in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. (1 Thessalonians 1:1b ESV)

These believers were rooted in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means Grace and Peace were dwelling in them. **Grace** (*Charis*) as a gift from God and **Peace** (*Shalom, Erene*) that they had with God as a result of accepting His Grace. It looks like Paul's heart overflows with thankfulness for these believers.

This is a letter of encouragement. Paul is encouraged by this newly established church (Acts 16-17). We will see that in detail in the coming weeks. 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 became Christians.³ God's Spirit was working in them. They were chosen by God (v4) to be light in the world around them. (Northern Greece).

Where is Thessalonica?

It was the heart of Macedonia (Greece). Macedonia was the kingdom of Alexander the Great, who conquered the world and wept because there were no more worlds left to conquer. God sent Paul to this area for a reason. "Paul left from Alexandrian Troas which was called after Alexander; he came to Macedonia which was Alexander's original kingdom; he worked at Philippi which was called after Philip, Alexander's father; he went on to Thessalonica which was called after Alexander's half-sister."⁴ God is sending Paul with a mission to open doors in Europe.

Thessalonica was an important city. The location of the city on the gulf created a strategic port for trade. Economically, it flourished and became a trade center. It had busy highway traffic from the east to the west; the highway was **called Egnatian Highway**. So the city was a crossroads populated with all cultures. Greek was the dominant language. The archeological discoveries also revealed that homes did not have windows, because they were fearful. Crime was very high. The city had wealthy people, a small middle class, and a large number of slaves. Social problems were a lot. Divorce was high. Unfortunately, prostitution was all over. They did not know how to abort babies. Therefore, unwanted babies were abandoned, especially girls.

Let me summarize: wealth, commerce, multi-culture, no middle class, poverty and misuse of power... Does this remind you of any modern metropolitan city these days?

This is the background of the city of Thessalonica. God led Paul in his second mission trip to go to this city and preach the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is thankful for the church he had planted a few months ago. Apparently, it has the marks of a healthy church. **What are those marks?**

The letter has two folds:

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

Second: the role of the congregation.

I will take the first fold this morning, and will continue next week the second part.

The Role of Paul and the leadership

1. A Life of Prayer is the most important thing a leader can have to lead a church.

In the book of Acts, we find that the disciples were sharing, preaching, teaching, and serving. The ministry was growing larger and larger. The disciples started to delegate. In chapter 6, we find seven men who were appointed to serve as

deacons. Luke, the author of Acts, mentions that they needed to do that in order for the leaders to

“devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4
ESV)

This is the primary task of the pastor of the church.

But I will say, not just the pastor, but the leadership of the church. And why not, for whoever is a dedicated Christian, devotion, prayer and study of the Word must be a number one priority.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father ... (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3a ESV)

This is the way Paul mentions in most of his letters, Romans:

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers... (Romans 1:9-10a ESV)

In Colossians:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, (Colossians 1:3 ESV)

“We give thanks... when we pray for you...” As you see, he is not alone in praying. **There is a group of people** praying for the church. In this case, Paul’s disciples. Badveli has deacons and a council. It is not just my role to pray, although I will continue praying. **But my challenge for a healthy church is to motivate more of you to join us in prayer.**

Illustration: I don't know why we have less people coming to church just to pray. Somehow praying is not appealing for congregation. We want change do be happen in our lives, church lives, community and nation. Please do not stop praying....

What did Paul pray for?

My congregation asks me to pray for different issues such as health, job, safety, travel, reconciliation... All those are important prayer requests. As the leadership of the church, we will pray for those. However, Paul prays for something else.

Paul prays for the **spiritual maturity, for the spiritual strength, for the spiritual growth of the church.**

Paul is praying and thankful for:

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 (better translated in Armenian: Հաւատքից Գործը) Labor of **Christ's love**, NIV translates, "**your labor prompted by love.**"

and endurance, steadfastness *hypomonē* (**under pressure**) of hope. Faith, Hope and Love... (we will elaborate on those next week).

Illustration: Kevin and I praying for our church Youth, Sunday School, Kids, Christian Education, Couples, Adults, Young Adults, all ages.... Sometimes less people come for our Bible studies, but we are praying continually without stopping.

The church of Thessalonica was **persecuted**:

for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 ESV)

This church was a new church, only three months old. They were facing persecution. Some lost their lives in these persecutions. The church stayed firm in faith. In fact, they became an example for other believers.

Another issue was **the idols**. Idols were all over the city. Remember this is a city of commerce, of making money. It looks very attractive to follow those "idols".

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

How often did Paul pray?

**as we pray most earnestly night and day (1 Thessalonians 3:10 ESV)
pray without ceasing, (1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV)**

There are more items he prayed for which I will introduce next week.

Illustration: A few weeks ago Badveli Mike Megreditchian saw Badveli Ara Jizmejian's calendar. It was filled with daily reminders to pray for the concerns of his youth group.

I was praying lately with group of prayer warriors not only for Badveli Ara Jizmejian's health. We are now praying for his wife Sylvia and the three kids. We are praying that their faith in God will be strengthened although they are facing a huge storm in their lives.

Lately I found individual photos of the youth that I prayed for when I was a youth worker. It brought a lot of memoires. How important it is to pray for each other.

2. The role of the leadership is first to pray and second to PROCLAIM the Gospel:

because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:5 ESV)

I have one agenda when I am here in the church: preach the Word of God. Proclaim the Word of God. If I do not do that, you should ask me to leave. If I am compromising the Word of God, I am a stumbling block. I should leave the ministry. Not only should the pastor proclaim, the church leadership and all activities should PROCLAIM the Gospel.

Illus. – One time a pastor asked a little girl if she attended Sunday School. "Oh, yes sir," she replied.

"And do you know the Bible?"

"Oh, yes sir," came the answer again.

Chuckling to himself, the pastor asked, "Could you perhaps tell me something in it?"

"Oh, I can tell you EVERYTHING that is in it."

"My!" said the pastor, "You're a smart little girl. Then tell me what's in the Bible."

*"Well, my sister's baby picture is in it; Mommy's recipe for apple pie is in it; a lock of my baby hair is in it; and the receipt for my Daddy's iPad is in it" she replied with a proud smile on her face.*⁵

Please notice that proclaiming, preaching without the power of the Holy Spirit is nothing. There will be no conviction. **"in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."**

Սուրբ Հոգիին ստուգութեամբ. This sermon is not just words, a lecture, a mental exercise, logical explanations, intellectual stimulation...all those factors can be in a sermon. A sermon can be effective when it is powered with the Holy Spirit.

Illustration: When Charles Spurgeon went to preach on Sundays, he always had the same routine. He'd climb those stairs to his pulpit, it was up high, and on every step he'd say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit." And when he got to the top, he knew he believed in the Holy Spirit. And he preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, energized, committed to the Spirit.

Pray that your pastor receives the Holy Spirit every day so that his sermons will be empowered by God, and not by Nerves. Pray that I will be biblical and empowered with the Holy Spirit.

3. Praying for his congregation, Proclaiming by the power of the Holy Spirit and third Becoming an example.

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6a ESV)

You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6a MSG)

Preaching the Word and living accordingly is extremely important in ministry. Each of us should examine his/her life in this area.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 ESV) (Timothy), **set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.** (1 Timothy 4:12 ESV) **Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,** (Ephesians 5: 15NIV)

Three important things for the leadership of the church to do:

Pray, Proclaim, and Model Christ in your life.

This is for the leadership and it means to all of us who are leaders in different settings. Home, work, community.

“Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer.”⁶

Amen

1. New Bible Commentary (Accordance)
2. ESV Study Bible Notes
3. NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone, Thessalonians* P 88
4. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, Thessalonians* P 179-180
5. <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-church-that-made-an-impact-why-the-thessalonian-church-made-an-impact-chuck-sligh-sermon-on--226657?ref=SermonSerps>
6. John Piper, “Always Pray and Do Not Lose Heart.” 1983