

A Church Like Thessalonica

Franklin Church of Christ
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April 17, 2005
PM Worship

Introduction:

If we can know anything about the church of the Thessalonians, we learn that Paul was proud of their service to God. Throughout his first letter to the brethren in Thessalonica, Paul constantly praised them even while admonishing them to grow in Christ. In fact, his opening words to the Thessalonians declared his thanks to God for them as a church of Christ. He was thankful for three reasons: their work of faith, their labor of love and their steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ (**I Thessalonians 1:3**).

Discussion:

- I. Work of faith.
 - A. The Thessalonians had been idolaters before Paul preached there (**I Thessalonians 1:9**). However, they turned to God and Paul was grateful for their reception of the Gospel.
 - B. The faith that is mentioned here means conviction. In context of the Gospel of Christ and this letter, the Thessalonians had been convicted of Jehovah God and Jesus, His Son and the Holy Spirit. They had been convicted that idolatry was wrong and Judaism was obsolete. They were convicted of the one church and body of Christ. They were convicted of God's plan of salvation.
 - C. This conviction produced work, which is defined business or employment. The Thessalonians were involved in a work together, the natural outpouring of their conviction in Jesus Christ. This tells us something. True faith in Christ and His Word produces action in our lives. If there is no action, then there is no faith (**James 2:26**).
 - D. What action did their faith produce?
 1. It produced the individual working of each member to serve Christ morally in their daily lives. **II Peter 1:5** demonstrates as Christians we are to add to our faith virtue or moral excellence. Paul gives a good bit of instruction to the Thessalonians regarding their personal daily service to Christ throughout the book, note especially **chapters 4 & 5**.
 2. It produced the work of maintaining doctrinal purity as mentioned in **II Thessalonians 2:15**. The reason for this is clear from **II John 9-10**. If the church did not maintain the pure teaching of Christ, they no longer had Christ.
 3. It produced working together to strengthen the body of Christ. As example, Paul commanded the Thessalonians to comfort one another (**I Thessalonians 4:18**). This entails building up the church just as Paul taught in **Ephesians 4:14-16**.
 4. It produced teaching the Gospel of Christ (**I Thessalonians 1:8**). This is one of the major products of conviction in Jesus. When we really believe the Gospel of Christ, we are going to tell others about it so they can also be saved.
 - E. One more point of application is to note that a church is not a place we go. A church is a group of people with whom we work based on common faith in Christ.
- II. Labor of love
 - A. The term "agape" translated "love" means unconditional love. One that is not based on what others have done for us, but rather loving for the same reason God loves: Because He is love (**I John 4:8**). Secondly, we also understand this love is not just a feeling, but an action. It is doing what is best for the one loved.
 - B. The term translated "labor" refers to "intense labor with trouble and toil." This is more than work, this is working through hardship.
 - C. Who did they love?
 1. The Thessalonians loved Jehovah God. They had been idolaters but had turned to God fully (**I Thessalonians 1:9**). **II John 6** demonstrates that loving God means keeping His commandments. **I Thessalonians 4:1** shows that the Thessalonians were already walking according to the instruction they had received.
 2. The Thessalonians loved their brethren in the congregation and elsewhere in the world. **I Thessalonians 4:9-10** explains that the Thessalonians had excelled in their love for other brethren throughout all Macedonia. Exactly how they had demonstrated that love is not revealed. However, we can guess that they had demonstrated love when Christians from

other places had visited Thessalonica. Secondly, they had probably extended a benevolent hand to Christians in other places who found themselves in need.

3. The Thessalonians loved non-Christians, which is evident by the fact that the word was being sounded forth from Thessalonica to many other places (**I Thessalonians 1:8**). After all, what greater thing can we do for people than teach them the saving Gospel.
- D. Evidently, in their love for these three different groups, the Thessalonians had endured toil and trouble. It wasn't always easy to love God, their brethren and those in the world. But they endured the toil and trouble and labor because of their love.

III. Steadfastness of hope in Christ Jesus.

- A. The Thessalonians had a hope in Jesus Christ. **I Thessalonians 1:10** describes their hope that Jesus would return and rescue them from the wrath to come. Paul also taught them that even if they died, they would be raised to meet the Lord on the final day (**I Thessalonians 4:15-18**).
- B. It is in **II Thessalonians 1:5-10** that Paul describes the wrath that is going to be outpoured on the world. It is a wrath that each and every person who has ever lived to the age of accountability, except Jesus, deserves (**Romans 3:23**). However, Jesus died and was resurrected so people would not have to suffer this wrath. The scripture was revealed so every man can know how to escape the wrath to come. The Thessalonians had a hope that they would not face this wrath, because they had faith and love.
- C. We must understand what this hope is. It is not just wishful thinking like people who hope a distant rich relative will give them a million dollars. This hope is the confident expectation of the promises of God based on the evidence which has given rise to our faith and love. We are not wishfully thinking we will be saved and go to heaven. We are waiting for the day, knowing that it is going to come.
- D. But what is this steadfastness of hope of which Paul spoke? The term translated steadfastness (patience, KJV) refers to "the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings." These Thessalonians continued their faith and love despite the fact that they had suffered because of it. **I Thessalonians 3:4** says Paul had warned the Thessalonians they would suffer affliction and that indeed they had. **II Thessalonians 1:4** mentions the Thessalonian perseverance through affliction and persecution.
- E. This affliction and persecution was not happening to everyone. It came upon them because they wanted to live Godly in Christ Jesus (**II Timothy 3:12**). They could have stopped the suffering by simply turning away from God. But they didn't. Why not? Because they looked not at the moment, but to the future. They knew, as we know, the wrath of God is coming on those who do not obey God. They knew, as we know, that heaven and eternity with God awaits those who serve Him. They knew, as we know, that what we suffer here for serving Christ is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us and in us in eternity (**Romans 8:18**). When they endured affliction for Christ, Paul exhorted them to comfort one another with the reminder that Jesus will return. Judgment and glory will come (**I Thessalonians 4:16-18**).

Conclusion:

What is the application of all this? The Franklin church needs to be like Thessalonica. We need to conduct ourselves in such a way that God can be proud of us as Paul was proud of the Thessalonian church. We must be involved in the work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope. We must not turn from the hardship, persecution and rejection that might come in our lives because of our uncompromising stand for the truth. Instead, we must steadfastly continue to work and labor because of our hope in Christ. The only way the church can have this reputation is if each and every one of us as individuals has this reputation. Do you steadfastly await the return of Jesus Christ? Can the people around you see it in your work of faith and labor of love? If so, then the advice of Paul stands clear for you. Continue in your worthy walk and excel still more (**I Thessalonians 4:1**). If, however, it cannot be seen in your actions, then I implore you to repent and be convicted that Christ is coming and work in His kingdom.