

What Every Church Should Be

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ² We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³ remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”

No doubt you have heard some preacher say, “If you ever find the perfect church, please don’t join it. If you do, it won’t be perfect any more!”

Since local churches are made up of human beings, saved by the grace of God, no church is perfect. But some churches are closer to the New Testament ideal than others. The church at Thessalonica was in that category. At least four times in this letter, Paul gave thanks for the church and the way it responded to his ministry (1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 5:18).

As I sat down to study Paul’s words to the church at Thessalonica, I must confess that my mind was drawn to our church right here at Mountain Grove. And as I read Paul’s words of praise, I could understand the pride and love that he must have felt for those whom he loved and led in their walk with God.

In this opening chapter we see Paul at his most winsome character. In a short time he was going to deal out warning and rebuke: but he begins with unmixed praise.

It is a wonderful thing when a pastor can think of his church and say, “We give thanks always for all of you.” Paul loved the church at Thessalonica; these people were on his heart and he was concerned

for their spiritual welfare. In this chapter, Paul tells us what kind of a church he left in that wicked city.

The first thing Paul says about the church at Thessalonica was that they were inspired by faith. Look at verse 3, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." These were people of faith. **What makes a church known by their faith?** What does it mean to be a great people of faith? **If we are going to be great people of faith, six things will have to be involved.**

First, there will have to be an understandable commitment to the Lord. Look at verses 3-4, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God." All of these words mean that they were great witnesses of the Lord. **By faith they witnessed; in love they labored for Christ; by their patience they waited upon the Lord.** In other words, they had made an understandable commitment to Jesus Christ for their lives.

Those people at Thessalonica were people of faith, and love, and patience, as they brought people into the fellowship of a growing church, as seen in Acts 17:4, "And some of them (the Jews) were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas." **They were growing and seeking people for the Kingdom of God.** Child of God, I am absolutely convinced, when a person is really saved, I mean *really* saved, they are going to have a heart to grow. **They are going to have a desire for the things of God.** And you and I have the responsibility to feed them on the living Word of God.

Therefore, a part of that great faith is a commitment to the Lord.

Second, they were conscientious in their living. Look at verse 5, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” Look over at verse 1 of chapter 4, “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.” **These Christians lived in a very evil day where immorality was running out of control.**

And the church that is worthy of God is conscientious in its living. The church of faith must be prepared to stand-alone with the Lord against the world. It doesn't matter what standard the world has, the standard of God does not change.

Third, they were involved in faith. They were conquering in spite of limitations. Look at verse 6, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” Paul says, “having received the word in much affliction.” Even in “much affliction” they conquered.

God is called by many names. He is the Lord, our Healer, our Provider, our Banner, and our Righteousness. He also promises to be our Deliverer. But there are many believers who never experience God’s mighty delivering and conquering power because Satan has convinced them to focus on their limitations instead of God’s power.

Sometimes people will say, “Bro. Cliff, you've got to understand about our giving, haven't you heard of the economy?” Haven't you heard of God? “Bro. Cliff, you have to understand about our church attendance, haven't you heard about the high price of fuel?” Haven't you heard of God? “Bro. Cliff, I would serve, or I would work with children, or I would teach, but I just don't have the education.” Listen to me tonight, if we don't trust God and walk in victory in spite of our limitations, we won't serve at all.

These believers at Thessalonica just gave, and they just worked. Every time they witnessed they got punished. Every time they shared their faith they got affliction. In fact, right before Paul wrote this letter, he and Silvanus were stoned at Philippi, but he said, "I want you to know that even though the Jews are persecuting us, and the Gentiles are persecuting you, it really doesn't matter what price you have to pay, because we have a job to do." And folks, I want to tell you something, if you and I back up from the dreams and the plans that God has given us, if we back up, I don't care what the excuse is, we fail. And I am telling you tonight, regardless of whom we have to tackle, and regardless of our circumstances, and regardless of what the excuse is, we must conquer in spite of our limitations.

Fourth, they had confidence in their leadership. Look at verse 13 of chapter 2, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." Now that is pretty amazing. The believers at Thessalonica believed that when Paul stood to preach, that it was actually God speaking through him. They just believed that Paul was God's "mouth-piece" to their church. And then there are those folks who say, "Well, we just ought to follow God." That is absolutely right, but God did not show up in Person tonight. Therefore, the people at Thessalonica believed that when the preacher preached, God spoke.

You say, "Preacher, is that egotism?" You know, you know, you know, a thousands times, it's not. But you also know that if God does not speak nothing worthwhile is going to be said tonight. Folks, don't come to hear Cliff Black, for I don't have anything worth hearing. But God has a Word for every person that has come to hear Him speak.

Now look at verses 12-13 of chapter 5, "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." Now there is the

quality of a great, growing, living, dynamic, church. They said, "Love your pastor and love one another." Now look at verse 9 of chapter 4, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." **And I thank God that I am pastor of a church where the people love to love each other.**

People of God need to have confidence in their leadership. That does not mean that we are not going to make mistakes, because we are, and I have. But in every church there has to be a leader, and there has to be those who will follow. **I know God has put me here to be your leader, and I know God wants you to follow, and I know God wants us to go forth in the name of Jesus as we walk in victory together.**

Fifth, they were consistent in their loyalties. Look at verses 4-8 of chapter 3, "For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord." Man that is good. **Paul was encouraged by their faithfulness. These people were consistent in their loyalties.** Folks, I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your faithfulness to the Lord.

People, when I look around, and I see the deadness of the religious crowd, and when I see the hand of God moving so mightily on this church, I cannot imagine anyone not wanting to be faithful to the Lord here at Mountain Grove Church.

The last thing, there a concern for what is lacking. Look at verse 10 of chapter 3, “Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith.” Let me tell you what I have learned in my years of ministry - ***It is easy to come and to voice our problems, but a real mark of faith is when you and I can get concerned enough to be obedient to God's will for our lives.***

God has called us to be a people of faith. And as a people of faith, we can make a difference in our world.