

## The Marks of a Church of Faith

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

As I sat down to study Paul's words to the church at Thessalonica, my mind was drawn to our own church here. And as I read Paul's words of *praise*, I could understand the *pride* and *love* he must have felt for those whom he *loved* and *led* in their walk with God. Today we have come to the end of our series on the Church, and I want to talk to you about "The Marks of a Church of Faith."

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 words were from his heart and he was concerned about their spiritual welfare. In this chapter, Paul tells us what kind of church he left in that wicked city.

Paul begins by saying they were a church inspired by faith. He says in verse 3, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." They were a people of faith. What makes a church known by their faith? What does it mean to be a church of faith? I want to share some marks of a church of faith.

First, there will have to be an understandable commitment to the Lord. He says in verses 2-4, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 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." Paul is using a language that refers to the fact they were great witnesses of the Lord. By faith they witnessed; in love they labored for Christ; by their patience they waited on the Lord.

In other words, they had made an understandable commitment to Jesus Christ for their lives!

Sometimes someone asked me, “Preacher, don’t you think we should develop people in their faith?” **Why?** Absolutely, I think we need to grow in *grace and knowledge* of God and His *Word*! I think we should become *mature believers* in the Lord! The reason we have preaching on Sunday morning, Bible studies on Sunday and Wednesday nights is to grow people spiritually. But let me ask you something – what do we mean when we want people to develop in their faith? Do we want new believers to turn out like us?

Do we want new believers to grow up to be soul-winners like us? How many of us have a family ready to walk this isle today? Here is the problem – if all the new believers grew up to be like us, we would just about go out of the soul-winning business! Do you want new believers to grow up to be involved in bible study like us? Why is it that we can have 500 – 600 people here on Sunday morning and only about 25 – 50 people downstairs for *intensive bible study* on Sunday and Wednesday night? Are you telling me that you and I are quality? You say, that is negative preaching! Sometimes the truth hurts a little bit! I mean, if you and I have arrived, God help us!!

These people at Thessalonica were people of faith, and love, and patience, as they brought people into the fellowship of a growing church! Acts 17:4 tells us, “Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.” They were growing and seeking people for the Kingdom of God! My friend, when a child of God gets their priorities straight, 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 of their living. Verse 5 says, “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.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 says, “Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more. For you remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” **These Christians were living in a very evil day (much like today) where immorality was running out of control!** Ladies and gentlemen, the church of faith must be prepared to stand-alone with the Lord against the world! Listen to me today – it doesn’t matter what standard the world had, the standard set forth in God’s Word does not change!

**Third, they were conquering in spite of their limitations.** Look at verse 6, “So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.” Paul says, “So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you.” Even in the midst of their suffering they were “more than conquerors”!

**In other words, they just gave to the Lord, and they just worked for the Lord.** Every time they saw a need they just gave! Every time they witnessed they were punished! In 2 Corinthians 1:1-15 Paul talks about being nearly stoned to death, 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, as long as God gets the glory!” **And folks, I want to tell you something – if you and I back up from the dreams that God has given us, if we back up, I don’t care what the excuse is - we fail!** I don’t care what reasons we are using, **we must conquer in spite of our limitations!** Hear me well today – I don’t care what Satan might come at us with; our God is still God and we are still “more than conquerors through Christ who loves us!”

**Four, they had confidence in their leadership.** Paul put it this way

in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God - which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.” **Man isn’t that something?**

**They believed that when Paul stood to preach, it was God speaking!** You say, “Preacher, isn’t that egotism?” **You know it’s not!** **Listen and get this – if God doesn’t speak from this pulpit today nothing worthwhile is going to be said!** Folks, if all you came here for today is to hear Cliff Black, we are in a mess! **But, if you have come here today to hear from God, I promise you – you will leave with a word from God!** **How do I know?** Because **I am going to share with you the inerrant, infallible Word of God** – without **compromise** and without **apology!** And God always honors His Word!

Paul said this in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, “Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.” **Now there is the quality for a great, growing, living, dynamic church of faith!** Their attitude was, “Love your pastor and love one another!” He says this in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, “But we don’t need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another.” **Church, I don’t have to stand up here and tell you we need to love each other – God’s Word has already told you that!** **I thank God I pastor a church where people love to love each other!!**

**Through my years of preaching, I have come to realize the people of God need to have confidence in their leadership!** That does not mean we are not going to make mistakes, because we are and I have. **Listen to be today – there are no perfect leaders and there are no perfect follows!** **But in every church there has to be a leader, and there has to be those who follow!** And I believe with all my heart, **if**

*we will work together for His glory, God will bless us beyond measure in the years ahead!*

**Last of all, they were consistent in their loyalties.** Look at 1 Thessalonians 3:4-8, “Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come - and they did, as you well know. That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the tempter had gotten the best of you and that our work had been useless. But now Timothy has just returned, bringing us good news about your faith and love. He reports that you always remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you. So we have been greatly encouraged in the midst of our troubles and suffering, dear brothers and sisters, because you have remained strong in your faith. It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord.” **Man that is good stuff! Do you know what the most encouraging thing is Paul’s life was? The *faithfulness* of his people!!**

You might be thinking, “Preacher, what do you want from us?” **I want you to be consistent to your loyalties!** I want you to love **God** and love **people**. I want you to be *positive in your conversations* that involve this Church. **I want you to be excited about what God has done in your life and share it with someone else who needs to hear it.** That is all I want, and I believe that is exactly what God wants from us!

If you have never been saved, why not today?

**Please stand for prayer.**

Father,

Your Word is true. Thank You for the blood of Christ that cleanses me from all my sin. Give me the courage to live me life as a light in this world of darkness as I make a difference for Your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.