

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 1:1-5** . . . Paul and Silvanus (*sil VAY nuhs*) and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. [2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; [3] constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, [4] knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; [5] for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

B. Pray

II. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

A. [1] Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in (*union with, under the authority of, and empowered by*) God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace** (*blessing, favor*) to you and **peace** (*overall well-being, especially spiritual well-being*).

1. Most of us are familiar with Timothy, so we don't need much in the way of background information on him.

a. As you probably recall from last Sunday's introduction to **1 Thessalonians**, Paul met Timothy in Lystra, and asked Timothy to join him and Silas on their missionary journey.

b. Timothy's father was Greek, and there is no mention of his name or if he was a Christian. Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a Jew who became a Christian (**Acts 16:1**). His grandmother, Lois, was also a Christian (**2 Timothy 1:5**). Paul spoke highly of the sincerity of their faith.

2. It is believed that Silvanus and Silas are the same person. Luke speaks of him as Silas in **Acts 15-18**, and Paul refers to him as Silvanus in his letters to the churches. Therefore, the Paul, Silvanus and Timothy of **1 Thessalonians 1:1** are the same Paul, Silas and Timothy of **Acts 17:14**.

a. According to **Acts 15:22**, Silas was one of the leading Christian men chosen by the Jerusalem apostles to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their missionary trip to Antioch.

- b. In **Acts 15:32**, Judas Barsabbas and Silas are called prophets.
 - c. The point being that Silas, or Silvanus, was recognized as a godly man of faith and a capable teacher who was both worthy and needful for supporting the work God had called Paul to do in reaching the Gentiles. And as we see from other scriptures, Timothy also fit this high godly standard for ministry.
3. I know I've made this point before, and yet I believe it is worth repeating. Godly leadership is vital to the spiritual health of any and every church. The less godly the leadership, the less spiritually healthy the individual attendees and the church as a whole. Regardless of how spiritual a church looks on the outside, without godly leadership it will not be spiritually healthy on the inside.
4. Jesus' disciples knew this well and verified their commitment to the requirement of godly leadership when a complaint arose in the church on the part of the Hellenistic Jews (*Jews who grew up in Greece and spoke Greek*) against the native Hebrew Christians. The complaint was that the [Hellenistic] widows being overlooked in the daily distribution of food to those who had need.
- a. So the twelve disciples summoned the congregation and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of **good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task**" (**Acts 6:1-3**).
 - b. Notice, the apostles made no mention of selecting men gifted in organization or distribution, or selecting men experienced in management. Their foremost qualifications for the task at hand were
 - (1) a good reputation (*trusted by the community*),
 - (2) filled with the Holy Spirit (*demonstrating godliness in daily life and in church life*),
 - (3) filled with wisdom (*godly wisdom*).
 - c. And why these requirements? Because fairly and properly caring for all the widows was not dependent on the caregiver's natural or learned skills, or even his spiritual gifts, but on his spiritual health and Christian maturity.
5. Added support for this principle is found in the NT qualifications for elders, deacons, and deaconesses as found in **1 Timothy 3:1-13**, **Titus 1:5-9**, **Titus 2:1-10**, and **1 Peter 5:1-5**. In these portions of scripture we see that godliness and spiritual health are the prerequisites for leadership.

6. And a final support for this principle can be found in **Revelation 2-3** where we have God's seven letters to the seven churches. In these letters, God commends one church for doing what they could to ensure godly leadership within the church. And God directly criticizes two churches and indirectly criticizes a third church for allowing or accepting ungodly leadership.
- B. [2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; [3] constantly bearing in mind your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ (*who is*) in the presence of our God and Father.
1. I pointed out the words **faith**, **love**, and **hope** when we read through this epistle last Sunday.
 2. Today, I want to place an equal emphasis on the descriptions preceding those three words, as well as the words themselves, because Paul is not simply referencing their faith, love, and hope, but their **work** of faith, **labor** of love, and **steadfastness** of hope. With this in mind, let's look at each of these phrases.
- C. **Work of faith** – The writer of Hebrews said, “**Without faith** it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God **must believe** that God is (*or He exists*) and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (**Hebrews 11:6**).
1. Based on this scripture and many others in the Old and New Testament, I believe we can rightly say that **faith is the cornerstone** of the Christian life.
 2. For example, without faith in Jesus Christ, we cannot become partakers of the saving work of Jesus Christ. And without trusting in His saving work, we will not receive God's gracious gift of eternal life.
 - a. However, the faith that pleases God goes far beyond faith in Christ's payment for our sin. We know this because saving faith begins with repentance – which is a change of mind and behavior that leads us away from a life of selfishness and sin and into a life of love and godliness. In other words, repentance is the work of saving faith. Therefore, **without repentance**, whatever saving faith we claim to have is nothing more than a shallow, empty claim – for it lacks the substance of action.
 - b. The reality is, faith is proven by our deeds, not our claims. Claims of faith in something or someone are just that – claims.

It is our works, or our deeds, or our faith produced actions that provides the evidence of what we believe and who we trust.

- c. James affirms this when he says, “faith without works is useless” (**James 2:20**). And in **James 2:26**, he says, “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”
3. Here in **1 Thessalonians**, Paul not only commends their **work of faith**, he validates it by giving examples of their **works of faith**. And I will point out two of those examples.
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 2:1**, “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also **endured the same sufferings** at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.”
 - b. **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10**, “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; [10] for indeed **you do practice [love] toward all the brethren** who are in all Macedonia.”
4. And Paul references a work of faith that is to be applied to all Christians everywhere. We find this in **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8**, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. [8] So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”
5. So once again, faith is the cornerstone or the foundation of the Christian life. And beginning with saving faith all the way to faith for daily living, our faith is validated by our thoughts, words, and deeds, not our claims.

D. **Labor of love** – We tend to think of love as a feeling that appears on its own, or that comes upon us spontaneously and makes us – almost effortlessly – behave in loving ways. And when that happens, it is a wonderful experience filled with warm and satisfying feelings.

1. However, this manifestation of love most often happens at the beginning of a relationship. Yet as most of us know, love seldom

- remains this way – even in a marriage. The reality is, it takes work to continuously rise to the standard of love to which God calls us.
2. And beyond the work required to consistently rise to God’s standard of love, it requires a **labor of love** to love those who are difficult to be with, unpleasant to be around, and self-centered.
 - a. It requires a **labor of love** to love when we are not receiving love in return, or to love when it is personally costly, or to love while being mistreated.
 - b. It requires a **labor of love** to love when being unjustly criticized, personally attacked, rejected, or disrespected.
 3. The reality is, we don’t feel the spontaneous, overwhelming and compelling feelings of love when faced with loving someone who is not very lovable, or who is mistreating you.
 - a. Love in these kinds of situations and with these kinds of people requires the hard work of dying to self and putting off any selfish forms of self-protection. It requires the continuous labor of resisting impatience, ungodly anger, resentment, bitterness, and pride. It requires guarding your thoughts and emotions, filtering your words, and carefully calculating your actions so that you continue loving as God loves you.
 - b. In other words, there is nothing spontaneous or effortless about loving anyone long-term.
 4. Jesus understood the labor required to love, for He not only spoke it, He lived it.
 - a. For example, in **John 15:12-13**, Jesus said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”
 - b. Yet as we know, Jesus not only laid His life down for His friends, He laid His life down for His enemies, for as we read in **Romans 5:8-9**. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the (*well-deserved*) wrath of God through Him.”
 - c. And yet, before ever dying for us, Jesus did the work of setting aside His position as God, leaving heaven, becoming a servant, and living as one of us. Or as Paul says in **2 Corinthians 8:9**, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

- d. My point is that God’s love for us and Jesus’ human expressions of God’s love was and continues to be a **labor of love**. And it is this **labor of love** that we are to practice toward one another – in the church and outside the church, with friends and with enemies, with family members, neighbors, or co-workers.
5. To help you see the practical application of this truth, think of someone you find challenging or hard to love. Then, with that person in mind, listen carefully as I read the familiar words of **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**. And as I read, consider the labor required to love this person according to God’s description of love. “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, [5] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, [6] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [7] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never fails.”

E. **Steadfastness of hope** – This word “**steadfastness**” is most often translated in the NT as “perseverance.” Its next most common translation is “endurance.” Therefore, the words “steadfastness of hope” can also be translated as the **perseverance of hope** or the **endurance of hope**.

1. The word “**hope**” speaks of a desire or longing for some good accompanied by the expectation of obtaining it. In other words, it is a settled confidence that what you are hoping for will be received.
2. When you put the fuller meaning of these two words together, the phrase “steadfastness of hope” becomes “persevering in whatever situation you are in with the confidence that the good God promises is forthcoming.”
3. Another way to say it is, “**remaining steadfastly confident that God will work all things out for good regardless of the circumstances or the people involved.**”
 - a. James alludes to the necessity of this “steadfastness of hope” when he says, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (**James 1:2-4**).
 - b. In other words, to face and endure the trials of life with a godly attitude and loving behavior, you have to persevere in clinging

to the confidence (*or steadfastness of hope*) that God will bring about the good He promises – which includes your spiritual growth in faith and godliness.

4. For me, steadfastness of hope is equal to confidently trusting that God is perfectly good and that whatever He does or allows will result in good regardless of how it looks at the moment. In other words, steadfastness of hope is equal to confidently believing you are perfectly and completely safe in God's hands.
 - a. **Hebrews 11** provides numerous examples of God's people who persevered in doing God's will with the confidence God would bring about the good He promised – even though it often seemed for a time that God was failing them.
 - b. My encouragement to you is to select a person from that chapter and use them as your example of trusting God with a steadfast hope in the face of trying circumstances. And when you are tempted to distrust God and take matters into your own hands, review the story and God's goodness toward the person you selected.

III. Conclusion

- A. In conclusion, I want to affirm that the **work of faith** and the **labor of love** and the **steadfastness of hope** are all essential qualities of the Christian life.
- B. And I want to leave you with these questions: “How are we as a church and you as an individual doing in each of these three areas? Is our/your progress commendable? Or do we need to excel still more?”