



1 THESSALONIANS: THREE REASONS TO BE THANKFUL

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Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- It's been a few weeks since we had our introductory lesson in **1 and 2 Thessalonians**. It's a new series for us that is subtitled, "**Faithful Endurance in One Direction.**"
- We started this series December 7 - but since then, we've had two special speakers, our celebration of The Lord's Supper, and our "Potluck with A Purpose."
- Add to that all the usual distractions of the Holiday season - - and there have been a lot of 'moving parts' over the past few weeks. So, I think a quick review is in order...
- We've begun this new series by looking at the background of **1 and 2 Thessalonians**, and we did this by unpacking the first two verses.
 - We learned last time that these two books are likely Paul's earliest **divinely inspired** books in the NT.
 - We also learned a bit about Paul – who he was BEFORE he miraculously came to faith, and who he was AFTER that point.
 - We discovered Paul wrote these books roughly 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when Paul was approximately in his late 40's.
 - We saw Paul was commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (or non-Jews), and he raised up the Thessalonian church on his second missionary journey to Asia Minor.
 - We looked at Paul's journey BEFORE he arrived in Thessalonica – and we learned some things about his journey AFTER that point.
 - We learned how Paul's young protégé, Timothy, was sent back to Thessalonica to see how they were doing – and we saw where Timothy came back to Paul with a great report.
 - We noted the extreme persecution and beatings that followed Paul wherever he went. We also saw Paul's personal example through all the challenges he faced – as well as the example of his companions.
 - We had a high-altitude review of the content of **1 and 2 Thessalonians**. We saw these books are not only rich in End Times issues, but they also are noted by some scholars to contain **all** the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.
 - In short, Paul was divinely inspired to write a treatise on the most important themes of Christian living, faith, and the church.
 - Paul wanted this young church to properly endure their personal struggles. He was concerned about their spiritual welfare above all else.

- He wanted them to properly endure the uncertainty of their times, to endure persecution, and to properly endure when they had few answers to their questions.
- In short, the content of **1 and 2 Thessalonians** holds a lot of value for us today. We face all the same needs to **‘Faithfully Endure in One Direction.’**
- We wrapped up last time by noting how Paul was especially thankful for this small new church in Thessalonica.
- It was a special church because Paul got a good report about it. That was a bit unusual for Paul, as we saw. He faced many disappointments in his ministry.
- THIS church was doing well – all things considered - and so Paul was thankful for their testimony.
- This is partly why this study in **1 and 2 Thessalonians** will be so beneficial for Solid Bread Community. It will keep us focused on our priorities.
- It will help us to celebrate the right things, and it will help us to responsibly deal with the wrong things.

NOTE: That brings us to **Ch. 1, and vs. 3 of 1 Thessalonians**. Here, we see specifically WHY Paul is thankful.

Paul provides a three-point outline in this verse. These are things he applauded in this little group of believers. These are three “signs” which should characterize **us** today. They are:

- A. Your WORK produced by faith**
- B. Your LABOR prompted by love**
- C. Your ENDURANCE inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

NOTE: When Timothy’s positive report came back to Paul, these three "signs" showed that this new body of believers was doing well. They evidenced THREE things to Paul:

- a. #1, his own labor among them had not been in vain,
- b. #2, they were authentic believers. They were the ‘real deal,’ and...
- c. #3, they showed ‘faith, love, and hope.” These were three key vital signs.

It was their fruit – their work, their labor and their endurance – it was their ‘faith, love, and hope’ - that provided clear evidence they possessed **genuine Christian character**.

NOTE: We’re going to look at each of these things - - but let me first comment on Paul’s statement *“We continually remember....”* That’s how he starts this verse.

1. If you read through the various NT books Paul wrote, he appears to show a pattern.
 - (As one commentator puts it [Bicknell]: *“(Paul) seems to have made a rule never to offer a petition for himself or others without first giving thanks for blessings previously received.”*)
 - Let me say that more simply: **Paul thanks God first, THEN he requests.**

- It's just a guess I'm making here – but it's based on human nature. My guess is this: *I doubt most of us follow Paul's pattern.*
- I think most of us – and I'm guilty of this too – tend to leap to our requests first when we are praying.
- We do this because we're more preoccupied with our needs and wants than we are focused on the things God has ALREADY done for us.
- We do this because we fail to properly perceive God Himself. If you glance ahead at **vs. 4**, you will see Paul makes his right view of God clear in all his statements.
- And it's Paul's right view of God that prompts him to thank God FIRST – and THEN make his requests known.
- Part of me wants to say this is not that big of a deal. Part of me wants to say God understands, He's gracious, and that sort of thing.
- But the other part of me (and this is the part that's growing in me these days), thinks this is a bigger deal than we realize.
- **You see - it's our human nature that focuses on our WANTS. It is often our lack of faith that focuses on our NEEDS.**
- It is our righteous nature – it's our maturity in Christ - that prioritizes our THANKS to God.
- I think God notices when we grow in our faith to where we properly arrange these two elements of our THANKS and WANTS.
- I think we show a humble and proper perspective of God when we seek God out to THANK HIM.
- In **Luke 17:11-19**, we read how Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one – and he was a Samaritan foreigner - came back to praise God and to thank Jesus personally.
- This true story highlights the importance of our gratitude. We read that Jesus noted the absence of the other nine lepers.
- He told the grateful Samaritan something unusual. He said, "*Your faith has made you well.*"
- I think there's an important point to be made here: our thankfulness is directly connected to a deeper spiritual wholesomeness.
- Or putting that another way - - our lack of gratitude and thanksgiving is indicative of a spiritual problem that we have.

NOTE: So we see the pattern in Paul that we do. As I said, it seems to be his habit. He offers clear thanksgiving BEFORE he mentions any needs or requests. I think it's good for us to think about this issue a bit - - and perhaps make some changes in our own lives.

2. I also briefly want to mention the construction of this verse. Essentially, the phrase, "*We continually remember*" applies to each of Paul's three points.
 - He '*continually remembers*' this little church's WORK produced by faith. He '*continually remembers*' their LABOR prompted by love, and so on.

- I want to give some attention to that word ‘*continually*.’ It’s a Greek word which was also used to describe a ‘hacking cough’ in an Egyptian letter that was written during the apostles’ times.
- The idea is it’s a constantly recurring prayer. It comes up often. It’s repeated so many times that it’s almost involuntary.
- It doesn’t mean “uninterruptedly.” Paul DID take a breather now and then. It means Paul prayed this prayer when an opportunity to do so presented itself.
- So, taken together – we see Paul frequently praying for this Thessalonian church, and when he did do that, he gave thanks for them, and he specifically gave thanks for the things they were showing.
- So - - what were they showing? Here is Paul’s three-point outline:

A. First: “Your WORK produced by faith” -

NOTE: Some translations say, “*your work of faith*.” It’s the same thing. This is the first issue on this list that Paul is thankful for.

NOTE: He’s thankful for WHAT they do - **because** of WHAT they have.

1. Let me be clear. This is **not** a matter of work-based salvation. I need to be plain in stating that, because – inevitably – someone will choose to hear me wrong.
 - I have found in my years in the church and in ministry, one is practically unable to mention the words ‘work’ and ‘faith’ in the same sentence without somebody becoming unhinged.
 - Paul is NOT insinuating here that these Thessalonian believers are contributing anything to their own salvation **by their works**.
 - **Ephesians 2:9** is very clear that it is ‘*not by works*’ that we are saved. Paul writes in the verse just before - - it is all about God’s ‘*grace*.’ It’s His ‘*gift*’ to us.
 - The bottom line is the Bible is very clear that mankind brings nothing to the salvation transaction.
 - There is nothing WE can add to “make our salvation legitimate.” Paul is not suggesting anything to the contrary here...
 - In fact, Paul also wrote in **Romans 1:18-32** (a portion of Scripture we dove into deeply a couple of months ago) that mankind wants nothing to do with God. It is our sin nature that positions us this way.
 - Because mankind is marinated in his natural depravity, we *choose* to sin, we *love* to sin, we *defend* our sin, and we even *celebrate* our sin. This is the larger message Paul intended in this **Romans** passage.
 - Therefore, it is impossible for sinful mankind to do anything to earn salvation. In that condition, we are not wired to go in a right direction.
 - Functionally speaking, in our PRE-faith state, we do not WANT a right relationship with God. Again – the Bible is very clear about this.
 - But thankfully, God wants everything to do with us. That’s why God directly and sovereignly intervenes in our depraved condition.

- It's why the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to believe in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, in FULL payment for our sins.
2. What Paul IS saying here in **1 Thessalonians 1:3**, is he's pleased they've put their faith into practice. It's a '*work OF faith*,' and not a '*work FOR faith*.'
- **NOTE:** I could say a lot about what this '*work of faith*' looks like, but let me extract a few basic points from our passage today, and from some other places in God's Word:
 - **#1, it means faith shows up in our conduct** – real faith is not passive or hidden. It never is. It should be obvious. It's not supposed to be in question.
 - It's clear to others. It shows up in what we do and say. It's the reason for the choices we make, and it's the reason for the choices we don't make.
 - **#2, it means faith shows up in our changes** – a little bit further on in **Chapter 1:9**, we read that these believers "*turned to God from idols.*"
 - A real faith is a changing faith. Ever meet someone who is the same AFTER their profession of faith as they were BEFORE?
 - The Bible's position on this matter strongly suggests they are not really saved.
 - **#3, it means faith shows up in our 'good works'** - We see in **Heb. 11:4** that it was "*By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.*" That was Abel DOING something, and he was DOING it "*better.*"
 - **#4, faith shows up in how we SPEAK about something.** Noah was a '*preacher of righteousness*' in **2 Peter 2:5**.
 - And we see in **Heb. 11:7** that it was Noah's faith that was behind the things he then said to others.
 - **And #5, faith shows up in our obedience.** Abraham "*obeyed*" by faith in **Heb. 11:8**.
 - The Thessalonian believers "*turned from idols*" as we saw. They were obedient in worshipping God properly, and so on.
 - **The bottom line is faith shows up in WHAT we do because of WHAT we have.**
 - That's Paul's point here – and he was delighted that this kind of evidence was clear in this new Thessalonian church.
3. Paul's whole point about 'works' being a demonstration of genuine 'faith' is summarized well in **James 2:14** where it says:

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"

- The implied answer to this question is *“No way! If someone claims to be a believer, but it does not show up in their actions, then they are lying. They don’t have a saving faith.”*
- James’ point is the same as Paul’s point. A REAL faith shows up. A REAL faith cannot be hidden. A REAL faith is demonstrated. A REAL faith turns belief into action.

B. Second: “your *LABOR* prompted by love”

NOTE: ‘Kopos’ is the Greek word here for ‘labor.’ It describes a state of discomfort or distress. It communicates trouble or difficulty. **I have two points to make here:**

1. First, the kind of Biblical ‘labor’ Paul mentions here involves toil, fatigue, suffering, weariness, and sorrow. It is a mark of Christian service and ministry.
 - This kind of labor is not possible without a proper eternal perspective. We’ll see that more in a moment.
 - This kind of labor makes no sense if we are operating by the world’s views, terms, and conditions.
 - In many places in God’s Word, we learn that believers should have the right incentive to carry on, to **labor** - even in exhausting and wearisome service.
 - We should have this right incentive because we KNOW (we BELIEVE) that this life is not all that there is.
 - A better life is pending. Our eternal life is coming. Our rewards from Jesus Christ are coming. And so, we ‘**labor**’ now – often in great distress – because of the assurances of what is ours to come.
 - This kind of labor goes against all the values of this world, but it proves our faith is intact. It proves our faith is central in our lives.
 - This is underscored in **1 Cor. 15:58** where – once again, we find it is Paul who is writing – he says:

*“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that **your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**”*

- It is significant that **1 Corinthians Ch. 15** is a portion of Scripture where Paul reveals much about the Rapture, about our glorified bodies, about the resurrection, and about our wonderful hope yet to come.
- It is in the context of all these beautiful forward-looking perspectives that Paul reminds us that our present ‘*labor in the Lord is not in vain.*’
- The truth is, when we are serving the Lord, there is exhaustion. There is a wearying toil. There are setbacks, challenges, and distress.
- This does not mean you are out of the will of God. As someone once said, *“When you are in His perfect will, He may well “wear you out.”*

NOTE: What I am sharing here is truth from the Bible, but it flies in the face of the so-called ‘prosperity Gospel.’ That is a blatant heresy. It is a dangerous false doctrine.

- Many people, pastors, and churches today – have wrongly subscribed to the belief that a life centered in the will of God is a life of EARTHLY happiness, EARTHLY reward, EARTHLY gain, and EARTHLY stability.
- It’s an attractive message. It lands nicely with those who want to avoid total commitment. It appeals to our base human nature, but **nothing about it is truthful.**
- The Bible mentions repeatedly (and we are looking at one such passage in our lesson today) that a life **centered in the will of God** is often a life of EARTHLY toil, fatigue, discomfort, and trouble. It’s called ‘labor.’
- It’s an outstanding credential of a church if it is properly ‘laboring.’ Paul is crystal clear about that – it is partly why he is thankful for this new Thessalonian church.
- It is true for bodies of believers, and it is true for individuals: a life centered in the will and service of God is **OFTEN** characterized by extreme persecution, setbacks, troubles, fatigue, and distress.

NOTE: Hebrews Ch. 11 is sometimes called the **"Hall of Faith"** or **"Hall of Heroes"** because it lists numerous OT figures who demonstrated their great faith, their confidence in God's promises, and their assurance of things they hoped for.

In emphasizing the virtues and qualities of these faithful individuals, **Hebrews Chapter 11** becomes one of the strongest arguments against the ‘prosperity Gospel’ fallacy. In **vss. 36-39**, we read what their loyal ‘labor’ in the service of God was like. It says:

*“Still others endured mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was **not worthy of them**. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith...”*

- All said, this ‘labor’ that Paul mentions - - this is a mark of a **SOLID, SURE, and truly SAVED** body of believers, and it is not an easy thing to be part of.
- I daresay that the underground persecuted church in the Middle East, in Asia, and in Africa – can personally relate to what I’m saying today.
- Unlike the deluded greater church in our nation today, these other churches **KNOW** what it’s like to toil, to be distressed, and to suffer.
- So why do they do it? For that matter, why did this baby church in Thessalonica do it? Why did they ‘labor’ like this?

2. That brings me to my second point here: their labor was “*prompted by love.*” LOVE was their motive. You can read that in **verse 3.**

- So, what does it mean to be “*prompted by love?*” This **love** is not romantic love (Greek: ‘eros’). It’s not the love of personal affection and warmth gained back from the one you are loving (Greek: ‘phileo’).
- But - it’s a distinctively Christian love. It’s the kind of love that springs from an invincible good will.
- It’s the kind of love that shows a persistent desire for the welfare of the one that is **being loved** – and the Greek word for that is ‘agape.’
- Paul recognizes that this little church’s ‘labor’ is motivated by a ‘sacrificial kind of love.’ This kind of love is all about ‘others first and me second.’ It’s ‘agape’ love.
- Where this kind of love is present, the toil and the fatigue and the distress become lighter. One ‘labors’ for a higher purpose and calling.
- A key sign that this kind of love is at work is a proper attitude - - it is certainly a ‘changed attitude’ if it is measured by the world’s standards.
- Look ahead at **vs. 6:** Instead of complaining about their afflictions, the Thessalonians focused on their “*joy given by the Holy Spirit.*”

NOTE: Let me give you a little acronym for ‘JOY,’ and it applies to what we are learning here. If you remember this, you will properly understand this kind of ‘agape’ love – and you will experience it as you need to:

- **J** is for Jesus. He needs to be our FIRST focus.
- **O** is for others. After Jesus, we need to focus on others.
- **Y** is for you. You come last. You are not number one.
- If you remember and apply this little acronym for ‘JOY,’ in that order, then you will experience that “*joy given by the Holy Spirit.*”

NOTE: I want to conclude this point about “*your labor prompted by love*” by telling you that this kind of love is a **personal choice**. It’s not a warm fuzzy, and it’s not sentimental. It boils down to being an active verb, and that means it is a **willful decision**.

(Cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7): This is a familiar passage. It captures this personal choice element. “*Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*”

NOTE: The Greek word for ‘love’ in this familiar passage is the same word Paul uses in **1 Thess. 1:3** - - it is ‘agape.’

- And so, everything we just saw in those few verses in **1 Corinthians** is about making a personal choice. It's about an act of will. You DECIDE to do this.
- It's about CHOOSING to labor sacrificially, about putting others before yourself, and about holding up under all the challenges - - because you are showing the Holy Spirit's presence and control in your life. This is why Paul was so thankful to see these things.

C. The last thing Paul is thankful for is: their “endurance inspired by HOPE in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

NOTE: Different translations use the word ‘steadfastness’ or ‘patience’ here. The same idea is communicated regardless of how it’s stated.

NOTE: This is ALL ABOUT the importance of preserving a proper forward-looking perspective. This is all about the true believer being convinced of what is to come.

1. One commentator [Vine] writes that this third element Paul is thankful for is further explained in the last verse of **chapter 1**.
 - I think this is the correct view. This is why these Thessalonian believers displayed their “endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - Their ‘hope’ here has to do with something unseen and future. **Romans 8:24-25** say:

"For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

- Several points are made in this **Romans** passage which apply to what Paul is telling these young Thessalonian believers:
 - You are properly hoping in something that has yet to happen.
 - You are NOT basing your hope on something that is now seen; if you were doing that, then it's not really ‘hope.’
 - Hoping for something wonderful that is yet to happen requires endurance, and you are showing that endurance.
2. The Greek word for ‘steadfastness’ or ‘endurance’ here is ‘*hupomone*,’ and it means to “remain under personal discipline; to subject oneself to something which requires our will to conform to - - where it normally wants to rebel.”
 - In English, when we talk about **endurance**, we tend to think we just need to stick it out or hang in there.
 - We need to hunker down and resign ourselves to the circumstances. There may even be a sense of regret or resentment with that posture.
 - That's not what ‘*hupomone*’ is implying. Instead, in this passage, it's saying we need to exercise a willful heroism and a brave constancy.
 - ‘*Hupomone*’ describes that steady determination to keep going, to continue even when everything in you wants to slow down or give up.

- We know we will face various obstacles, trials, and persecutions, and we know these things will test our spiritual keel. But, we stay on course.

NOTE: It is foolishness to hope this way unless there is a good reason to hope this way. And for the believer, that hope is in the return of Jesus Christ.

- This quality – this attribute of exercising Godly endurance BASED UPON A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST, **is a hallmark quality of a sound believer and of a sound church.**
- Paul knows that; he is convinced of that. And so, he is thankful to see it in this little body of believers.

I WILL WRAP UP: When Paul wrote his letter we call **1 Thessalonians** to this infant church, this new body of believers, he was looking for evidence that their faith was the REAL deal. He found it! He was thankful.

Paul wants them to see what he sees. He mentions their **faith, love, hope**. And he even lists these things in their logical order. **Faith** rests on the past, **love** works in the present, and **hope** looks to the future.

If I put that another way, FAITH looks back to the saving work of Jesus Christ, our Crucified Savior. LOVE serves Jesus Christ, our Crowned Savior. HOPE anticipates Jesus Christ, our Coming Savior.

NEXT TIME: “How We Know We Are Chosen By God.” Paul outlines the sovereign nature of God, and he shows how this was evident in these believers’ transformative salvation.



Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God’s Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don’t pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don’t teach what is NOT there. Don’t force a passage to mean something it really doesn’t.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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