

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

How many of us could sadly say we've heard or spoken more negative talk than positive affirming conversations within Christian circles? Do our reprimands outnumber the times we've spoken genuine affirmation? Rebuke certainly can be biblical, but could it be we've swung heavily in that direction and gotten off balance? Think of a time when you were given a God-honoring affirmation from another believer. Did it spur you on in the faith or encourage you to persevere in your work for the Lord? The call of the Church is to build one another up (Eph. 4:29) - something the apostle Paul imitated for us so well. In the next nine verses of his letter to the Thessalonian Church, Paul so affirms this body of believers in a biblical way that undoubtedly gave heavy encouragement for them to continue to press onward in Jesus.

There's a difference between flattery/man-pleasing and true, honest affirmation. Paul opposed man-pleasing (1 Thess 2:3-6; Gal 1:10).

Why give such strong affirmation? Well, for starters, news of their perseverance was spreading: This church was living out its faith despite relentless persecution. The example the Thessalonians set for the church today is remarkable.

Before we look at the three areas causing Paul to break out in thanks to God, let's refresh our minds with the persecution faced at the onset of the church in Thessalonica. Hopefully this was part of your discussion as you studied the establishment and background of the church last week from Acts Chapter 17. After the uproar in the city, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica to Berea. Who eventually met them there and began stirring the crowds? (See Acts 17:10-13).

You got it! It was the Jews from Thessalonica who opposed Paul's teaching and were responsible for the previous mob.

So relentless was their pursuit against Paul and his companions, that the Thessalonian church was perhaps given a bird's eye view to observe from the start persecution with which believers today grapple. From the moment the Word of God was preached, the Thessalonian Church quickly came to know this reality- the inevitable persecution that comes to a Christ follower.

Why is this observation so critical to make? Because of the powerful authenticity it shows concerning the Thessalonians. It's one thing to be full of faith, love and hope when life is peachy. Yet, we all know those aren't the stories turning heads and making headlines. In stark contrast, when Christians remain steadfast in their work for the Lord despite great suffering and hardship, it speaks magnitudes and the world takes notice. It's what makes Jesus appealing to the curious onlooker. *Who is this Jesus for whom you're willing to suffer so?*

Scripture references on suffering:
[John 16:33](#);
 Romans 8:18;
 2 Corinthians 4:17-18;
 1 Peter 4:12-13.

The New Testament is very clear when it speaks to the life of a believer in relation to suffering and hardship. We are told it is to be expected this side of heaven, but everything in us rejects it. This, of course, is because we were created for heaven, but we remain in the tension of *not yet*. Somehow, we've fallen into the belief that a Christian life of faith should be a cakewalk, and we've carried new believers with us. When persecution, alienation, rejection and so on comes upon them, many of them are left wondering where they went wrong. *You mean this is part of it?* Yes. And it's high time for those that have walked this faith road a little longer and know, to speak up about it. The Thessalonians knew, and their actions spoke louder than words. How loud? LOUD. They *became imitators of the Apostle and of the Lord*, receiving the messages of salvation with *much affliction* but *with the joy of the Holy Spirit*. THIS was an example to *all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia*.

Thanksgiving and Encouragement to the Church at Thessalonica

When Paul thanks God, he's recognizing the Source of the Thessalonian's salvation and remembering the magnitude of the work that was resulting from that salvation. *By thanking God at the beginning of the epistle, Paul lifts the thought above the human level and rises above the conventional opening of letters of his time. He is not trying to win the Thessalonians over by rhetorical flattery. On the contrary, he is sincerely trying to give the ultimate credit to the One from whom spiritual progress comes. When Christians realize their complete dependence on God and keep this in clear focus, then and only then are they capable of moving on to greater spiritual exploits such as those spoken of later in this Epistle.*¹

Specifically, Paul is prompted to continuous thanksgiving for the believers before God as he remembers their **work of faith, labor of love**, and **steadfastness in hope**. If we are at all familiar with other Pauline literature, we might be tempted to think his clear praise of their *work of faith* contradicts

¹ Thomas, R. L. (1981). [1 Thessalonians](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

his preaching elsewhere against a salvation produced by good works. Paul's words are not a rejection of his preaching in the least bit. Paul is referencing the character of a true believer that results after salvation...results of a faith-filled life, walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26, Eph 2:10, James 2:14-26).

Faith works.

Love labors.

Hope is steadfast (endures).

Absolutely fascinating in verse two are Paul's use of the words "work" (*ergou* – in the Greek) and "labor" (*kopou*). Obviously, we know these words to be synonyms, and because of that, they do not necessarily catch our eye. However, the latter word for *labor* (*kopou*) packs a much more intense meaning. *Labor* (*kopou*) in the Greek means *toil, as reducing the strength*.² This word paints a picture of a type of labor in love that pushes us to the point of exhaustion and fatigue - a type of love that requires a great deal of exertion on the part of the laborer. If we are honest, loving people can be a challenge. As the Body of Christ, we are called to *labor in love*. Jesus stressed this in Mark 12,

**See also
Luke
10:25-37;
Romans
13:8-10.**

28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."³

Let's not make the assumption that the Thessalonians found this task free from difficulty, or that the people amongst them were easy to love. As we've discussed already, the wording Paul uses crumbles such a thought anyway. When loving our neighbor seems about as effortless as moving a mega boulder by hand, what will give us endurance?

HOPE.

Paul recognizes the ***steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ*** in the Thessalonians as he gives thanks to God for them. What kept the Thessalonians going in the midst of pain and hardship, through the labor that loving others required of them, was HOPE in the Lord Jesus. *Believers are able to endure because of the hope they have in the Lord. "Hope" does not express a baseless wish but a confident expectation of the Lord's future work. That*

² Strong, J. (1996). *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mk 12:28-31). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

*Christians live expectantly (in hope) is evidence of the genuineness of their commitment to and confidence in the Lord.*⁴

It seems as if the Thessalonians had their identity as sojourners on this earth embedded deep. Nothing drives a steadfastness and endurance of hope in the Lord like the knowledge that this isn't all there is. We are looking forward to the Kingdom to come. For now, we exist as a chosen race and a people called to proclaim the excellence of Him Who called us out of darkness (1 Peter 2:9).

The Thessalonians were proclaiming alright. Simply put, the Gospel preached to the Thessalonians was characterized by power, being in the Holy Spirit with full conviction (v 5); which led to their receiving the message with joy (v 6). As a result, word of their faith in the Lord went out not just in Macedonia, but everywhere. *Whether or not Paul's words of praise are hyperbolic, his comments still functioned to affirm the church. The story of the Thessalonians was so impressive that others already were telling it as they traveled among the congregations.*⁵ Detailed in their testimony was the fact that they had turned from idols to serve the living God and were awaiting for His Son and their ultimate deliverance.

The church of Thessalonica... serving and waiting. A glorious picture of the Bride of Christ.

We have such a great need for endurance while in this world if we are to keep our heads on straight with eyes fixed on Jesus. The temptation to crumble in the face of persecution and hardship, to refuse to labor in love, or turn our eyes to worthless things and go back to our idols is ever present. Could it be that our struggle to remain steadfast stems from a lack of longing and expectation for Christ to return? *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*⁶ This isn't a fairytale, folks. The Gospel is miraculous and full of power. Jesus Christ suffered, died and was buried. Three days later He defeated death by His resurrection. The way He ascended into Heaven will be the way He one day returns. Are we looking?

⁴ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

⁵ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:19, English Standard Version.