

Characteristics of a Great Church

A Saved Church

I Thess 1:1-10

Pt. 3

1 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, ⁴ knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 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.

⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

INTRODUCTION

John Bunyan said, “For some the entrance to hell is from the portals of heaven”. His words could not more accurately depict the sad plight of many who believe they are Christians! They are at the very gates of heaven as it were, but will never enter because they are under a terrible delusion. The church is filled with people who are not really saved, but think they are.

As startling as this idea may appear, recent research indicates it is a hard reality for many churches in the United States. Researcher George Barna has discovered the disturbing fact that “half of all adults who attend Protestant churches on a typical Sunday morning are not Christian.” He also points out that people who call themselves Christians but are not born again are “a group that constitutes a majority of churchgoers.”

Barna’s findings are similar to those reported by Bill Bright, founder and fifty-year president of Campus Crusade for Christ. According to Bright, “Our surveys suggest that over 50% of the hundred million people in church here in the United States every Sunday are not sure of their salvation.”

In addition to discovering that 50% of people in church are “lost churchgoers,” the Barna Research Group has also revealed that 44% of Americans are “notional Christians.” These 90 million notional Christians are people who describe themselves as Christians but do not believe that their hope for eternal life is based on a personal relationship with Jesus and the belief that He died and rose again from the dead.

According to On Mission magazine, published by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention,

“notional Christians” do not know “whether they will experience eternal life, eternal damnation or some other outcome.”

In addition to not knowing their eternal destiny, many churchgoers hold to inconsistent beliefs about how people get to heaven. In an October 2003 study, Barna revealed that 50% of professing born again Christians “contend that a person can earn salvation based upon good works.” This clearly contradicts the biblical teaching that salvation is by grace alone, not by works.

The confusion of churchgoers also extends to the way of salvation. Although the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only way of salvation, Barna points out that “Many committed born again Christians believe that people have multiple options for gaining entry to Heaven.”

Barna says that many who attend Protestant churches have been “anesthetized” to the Gospel. Many have mentally accepted correct beliefs but have “lived without a shred of insight into what a relationship with Christ was all about.”

REVIEW

LESSON

³ remembering without ceasing

Constantly (89) (**adialeiptos [word study]** from **a** = negative + **dialeipô** = leave off, cease, leave an interval whether of space or time) means uninterruptedly, without omission, without ceasing and was a word used to describe that which was done continuously.

Bearing in mind (3421) (**mnemoneuo** from **mimnésko** = recall to one's mind) means to keep in mind, exercise memory, call something to mind or recollect. The **present tense** signifies that this was their lifestyle. The meaning is not that this memory occupied the missionaries to the exclusion of everything else but rather that their remembrance of it constantly recurred.

I. A WORKING CHURCH

your work of faith,

Work of faith - Their work originated from, emanated from or sprang from their faith. Faith alone saves but genuine faith is evidenced by corresponding good works in the Spirit. Notice the pattern in Ephesians 2...

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;⁹ not as a result of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (See **notes** [Ephesians 2:8](#); [2:9](#); [2:10](#))

Hiebert adds that in the phrase **work of faith**...

the emphasis is on the work that faith produces. If there were no faith there would have been no work. The faith of the Thessalonians was no mere speculative belief; it was energetic and productive. Paul fully agreed with James that **faith without deeds is dead** ([James 2:26](#)-

note). Paul's reference is not to the initial work of saving faith but rather relates to the whole Christian life as it is ruled and energized by faith. (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996)

Wayne Grudem defines **faith** that saves one's soul...

Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. This definition emphasizes that saving faith is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me... The definition emphasizes personal trust in Christ, not just belief in facts about Christ. Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, the word "trust" is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word "faith" or "belief." The reason is that we can "believe" something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it. (Grudem, W. A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* Zondervan) (Bolding added)

EXAMPLES OF GENUINE FAITH

John 2:22

²² Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they **believed** the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many **believed in** His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not **commit** Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

John 8:30

³⁰ As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES OF FAITH THAT DOES NOT SAVE, A BELIEF THAT DECEIVES, A BELIEF THAT WILL SEND YOU TO HELL

SO THEN WHAT IS IT THAT ENSURES THAT YOUR FAITH IS REAL.

John 3:36

English Standard Version

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Romans 2

James 2:14

What saves is faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. —J. I. Packer

The highly respected theologian **Louis Berkhof** defines **genuine faith** in essentially the same way noting that it includes an intellectual element (*notitia*), which is "*a positive recognition of the truth*"; an emotional element (*assensus*), which includes "*a deep conviction of the truth*"; and a volitional element (*fiducia*), which involves "*a personal trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, including a surrender ... to Christ.*" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939)

To escape the error of salvation by works we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without **obedience**.

A whole new generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to "accept" Christ without forsaking the world.

Faith, as Paul saw it, was a living, flaming thing leading to surrender and obedience to the commandments of Christ.

Real faith invariably produces holiness of heart and righteousness of life.

II. A GENIUNE CHURCH

Labor of Love

Labor (2873) (**kopos** from **kopto** = chop, hew, cut down, strike; figuratively to lament which apparently came from the idea of striking one's breast) (See also study of related verb **kopiaio**) is strictly a smiting as a sign of sorrow, then sorrow itself. **Kopos** thus describes a state of discomfort or distress, trouble, difficulty, transferring the sense of the primary meaning which is beating.

Kopos referring to labor conveys the sense that the labor involves toil, fatigue, suffering, weariness and sorrow. It thus speaks of an intense effort which can be united with trouble. In short **kopos** conveys the idea of arduous toil involving sweat and fatigue and emphasizes the weariness which follows as a result of the straining of all of one's powers to the utmost.

Rev. 2:2 (Jesus addressing the church at Ephesus - see note) 'I know your deeds and your **toil** (**kopos**) and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false

TDNT has a discussion on the Secular and OT uses of kopos and the derivative verb kopiao writing that....

In secular Greek **kópos** means a. "beating" or the "weariness" caused by it, and b. the "exertion" (e.g., of manual work) that brings on physical tiredness. **kopiao** **[word study]**, then, means "to tire," "to wear oneself out." The **Septuagint (LXX)** uses it for tiring in battle ([2Sa 23:10](#)), for exertion in work ([Josh 24:13](#)), and for the groans of the afflicted ([Ps 6:6](#)).

Your labor prompted by love is the toilsome, laborious activity that is prompted and sustained by love when the going gets hard. The stress in the word **labor** is on the cost, exertion, fatigue, and exhaustion that it entails. **Work** (ergon) may be pleasant and stimulating, but **labor** implies toil that is strenuous and sweat-producing.

Spurgeon calls the labor of love "Heaven's Cement"...

“**Love** is a grace that will make us industrious for the good of others, and therefore we read of the ‘**labor of love**’ ([1Th. 1:3](#)). It is **gluten animarum**, the glue of souls, the cement and solder of the church; the jointing that runneth throughout all the living and squared stones ([Col 3:14](#)). By this souls are mingled, and all mutual offices are cheerfully performed.”

O for more of this sacred cement

John writes

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. ([1John 5:1](#), [2](#), [3](#))

Comment: The point is that love is shown to be authentic by keeping God's commandments. One who says "Sure I love God and the brethren" should have substantiation of that declaration.

Romans 5:8 (NASB95)

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 3:16 (NASB95)

16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

John 14:15 (NASB95)

15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

John 14:21 (NASB95)

21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

1 John 5:2 (NASB95)

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

III. A PERSEVERING CHURCH

and **patience** of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ

Patience

Steadfastness (5281) (**hupomone [word study]** from **hupo** = under + **meno** = abide) is literally abiding under pressure. The root idea of **hupomone** is that of remaining under some discipline, subjecting one's self to something which demands the acquiescence of the will to something against which one naturally would rebel. It portrays a picture of steadfastly and unflinchingly bearing up under a heavy load and describes that quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. The picture is that of steadfastness, constancy and endurance.

Trench says that **hupomone** does not mark merely endurance, or even patience, but the perseverance, the brave patience with which the Christian contends against the various hindrances, persecutions, and temptations that befall him in his conflict with the inward and outward world." He adds that **hupomone** is "that temper of spirit in which we accept God's dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.

Hope ([elpis \[word study\]](#)) is the desire for some good with the expectation of obtaining it. Hope in Scripture is the absolute certainty of future good.

MacArthur adds that

Hope transcends mere human, wishful anticipation and rests confidently in the consummation of redemption that Scripture says will certainly occur when Christ returns. Such **hope** will inevitably cause believers to triumph over the struggles of life because it derives from the type of true faith the Thessalonians received from God.

In our Lord Jesus Christ is amplified by the parallel passage [1Th 1:10-note](#) which states that the saints at Thessalonica were eagerly **waiting for His Son from heaven** . In other words, this was their hope and this hope was the grounds for their hanging on or exhibiting steadfastness. This hope is not the world's vapid, groundless hope (which is more like hype!), but is a certain, sure promise of future good from the hand of God. Paul is describing steadfastness or endurance under trial which is the result of conscious, active (rather than passive) waiting for the certain coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for it is "Christ Jesus, Who is our Hope ([1Ti 1:1-note](#))

John Piper says that

We do not live in a generation that puts a high premium on endurance in relationships or jobs or in ministry. And we are very much children of our age. If we follow Scripture here we will be swimming against the tide. So be it! This is a call for the endurance of the saints!

Perseverance of the Saints

17. The Perseverance of the Saints

- 1 Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, and has effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but they will certainly persevere in that state to the end and be eternally saved. And though many storms and floods arise and beat against the saints, yet these things shall never be able to sweep them off the foundation and rock which they are fastened upon by faith. Even though, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sight and feeling of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet God is still the same, and they are sure to be kept by His power until their salvation is complete, when they shall enjoy the purchased possession which is theirs, for they are engraved upon the palm of His hands, and their names have been written in His Book of Life from all eternity.

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,

2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

Colossians 1:21-23

21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach —

23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Hebrews 6:11-12

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

James 1:2-4

2 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.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶

Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way,

as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

in the sight of our God and Father,

IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR GOD AND FATHER: *emprosthen tou theou kai patros hemon*: ([Eccl 2:26](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [10:31](#); [2 Co 2:17](#); [1 Ti 2:3](#); [Heb 13:21](#); [1Pe 3:4](#); [1Jn 3:21](#))

In the presence of (1715) (*emprosthen* from *en* = in + *prósthēn* = in front of) pertains to a position in front of or before and can include the idea of in the sight of (cf [1 Ti 2:3](#); [Heb 13:21](#); [1Pe 3:4](#)). The Thessalonians' work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope are carried out in the presence of the all seeing eye of God (cp [2Chr 16:9](#), [Pr 15:3](#), [Heb 4:13](#)).

Matthew Henry comments that

the great motive to sincerity is the apprehension of God's eye as always upon us; and it is a sign of sincerity when in all we do we endeavour to approve ourselves to God, and that is right which is so in the sight of God. Then is the work of faith, or labour of love, or patience of hope, sincere, when it is done under the eye of God.

A T Robertson adds that this ultimately comes to fruition in the day of judgment when all shall appear before God.

The perseverance of the saints is a delight to those struggling with sin. If you are His and He is yours, the means of grace that Christ has ordained will give you victory. While your struggle may last a lifetime, nothing can withstand the power of the cross.

The ruling motif in the believer's life is the cross—the greatest symbol of victory over shame and sin and sorrow and loss. The God who promised that He would restore the years that the locust had eaten (Joel 2:25) is the God who will cause all things—all things—to work together for your good (Romans 8:28).

The perseverance of the saints is a delight to the believer. For it magnifies the Father who predestined us to salvation in the mystery of His love, as well as Jesus Christ who became the Mediator of this covenant and lived for us and died for us and rose again for us, and the Holy Spirit who actively works in and through us. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27). As this doctrine magnifies God, it correspondingly excites our souls to prayer and adoration, and convinces us of our total dependence upon the Savior.

The perseverance of the saints is a delight to the soul of the saint who needs encouragement to follow the Lord. Far from engendering lackadaisical attitudes toward sanctification, this doctrine, if received as taught in the Word of God, promotes holiness of life. For the Scriptures teach us: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). But the Lord not only warns us so that we may cling to His grace all the more and then let holy lives arise from the riches of grace which He has bestowed, but He wins us with His promises of persevering.

The perseverance of the saints is a delight to parents of prodigals. If your children are Christ's own, then know that as Christ prayed for Peter, He is praying for your children. No one who has truly, not just tasted, but drunk deep of the grace of God, can stay away from that refreshment forever.

The perseverance of the saints is a delight to the souls of family members who watch their loved ones suffer under devastating

sickness and disease in this life. Know that Christ keeps His own even when our world is darkened by disease and aging, for He says, “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31 KJV), and “even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save” (Isaiah 46:4).

The perseverance of the saints is a delight to the dying. The Savior who ordained your salvation before the foundation of the world, who sent His Son to live and die for you on Calvary’s cross, who sent the Spirit to claim you as His child, will never let you go. And not even the prospect of death can now shake you from Christ. For it is Christ who has hold of you. He will keep you safe all the way home: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

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