

Subject: A Church That Honors God

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

After a few words of introduction, Paul commends this church for many good things. This church at Thessalonica was not a perfect church, but it was an outstanding example of what a church could be and should be. Last time in our series of sermons on the church we looked at what it means to be a praying church. In the first of Paul's letters to this church he lays out the pattern for a church that honors God.

First of all, notice what Paul did *not* say about this church. There is no reference to the number of members. There is no word about their goals, programs, the kind of sermons they preached, or the songs they sang. Nothing is said about their Sunday school or their worship services. However, Paul does mention several spiritual things about this church. A church that honors God is...

1. A saved church (vs. 1-5)

Let's look at how the church at Thessalonica got started.

Acts 17:1-4¹ *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:*² *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,*³ *Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.*⁴ *And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.*

- God's work in calling them (vs. 4)

God had called them and they heard and received God's call to salvation. Both things were true, but God is the initiator. It was evident that God called and saved them because the message changed their lives. It came in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance.

2 Peter 1:10 *...give diligence to make your calling and election sure*

- God's work in converting them (vs. 9)

They had turned from their sins and false gods to serve the true and living God. This is true repentance and conversion (turning away from sin and turning to God). Thessalonica was about 50 miles from Mt. Olympus, supposedly the headquarters of the Greek gods. These people had been raised to believe in all kinds of gods, but when they were saved they left all that false worship behind and started living for Jesus. That's what real conversion is. One man said, "Show me you your redeemed life and I might believe in your Redeemer."

- God's work in confirming them (vs. 3, 5)

Their lives proved that they were truly saved. The virtues of faith, love, and hope were evident. How do you see faith, love, and hope? You see them in someone's life. Their "work of faith" means their faith produced good work. The Bible says "faith without works is dead." The opposite of that is true: faith with works is alive. It is real faith. Their "labor of love" means their love for Jesus showed in the way they lived, and not just in what they said.

It's easy enough to sing, "Oh, how I love Jesus" on Sunday. The real test is how we show that love on Monday through Saturday. Their "patience of hope" means they endured and waited on God because of their eternal hope. They were living with their eyes on the prize. They were a saved church – called, converted, and confirmed. They honored God.

2. A steadfast church (vs. 6)

They became followers of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (vs. 1) and followers of the Lord. Being a Christian is a lot like "Follow the leader," but it's not a game. The pursuit of the Christian life is to be like Christ. A. W. Tozer said that if a 100 pianos were tuned to each other, they would be off pitch. But if they were all tuned to one tuning fork, they would automatically be tuned to each other.

Jesus called people to follow Him and He said it would not be easy. He said: "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." The word translated "followers" means imitators (our English word, "mimics"). They followed Jesus and suffered like He did. They followed the example of Paul and suffered like he did. Notice in verse 6, "having received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Ghost." It was not easy to be a Christian in Thessalonica. Persecution began from the very start of that church.

Acts 17:5-7⁵ But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.⁶ And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;⁷ Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

Acts 17:10-13¹⁰ And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.¹¹ These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.¹² Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.¹³ But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Paul had to leave the church and continued on his missionary journey. Some time had passed and he was concerned about the church at Thessalonica, so he sent Timothy to find out how they were doing. Then Timothy returned and gave Paul a report.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-8⁶ But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:⁷ Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:⁸ For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. They were a saved church and a steadfast church. They honored God.

3. A soul-winning church (vs. 7-9)

They were examples to other believers all over Greece (vs. 7) and even beyond (vs. 8).

The word “examples” was used for a seal that made its imprint in hot wax and for a stamp that minted coins. Their testimony left a mark on others. Their influence was local, national, and even international.

Verse 8 (“sounded out”) describes their witness as an echo. An echo always repeats what is originally spoken. God puts His Spirit in the church and in each believer. He doesn’t want a church to create its own message. He wants the church to echo His truth. This church was like an amplifier for the gospel. Their testimony was so powerful they had a worldwide impact for Christ. God’s work in the church at Thessalonica was big news.

4. A second-coming church (vs. 10)

The second coming of Christ is mentioned in all five chapters of this letter. These believers knew that Jesus was coming again and they were waiting and looking for Him at any time. Jesus made us a promise:

John 14:3 *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

He told us to be ready and that He would come as a thief in the night. Buddy Wright told me about conversations he had with people who claimed to be Christians, but they didn’t want to talk about the second coming of Christ. This bothered Buddy a lot and he would tell me, “If you’re not looking for Him and excited about His coming, then He’s not coming for you.” That’s what the Bible says.

Hebrews 9:28 *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. A church that eagerly looks for Christ to return is a church that honors God.*

5. A submissive church (2:13)

This church had a receptive and submissive heart for God’s Word.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

This is a list of short commands Paul wrote to the church, and the remarkable thing about it is that he didn’t add anything to tell them why. He just told them what to do, and counted on them to do it. Imagine a preacher saying, “My text is 5:16, Rejoice evermore. Next week we will consider verse 17. Now let’s pray.” A church that is submissive to the Word is a church that honors God. How about Liberty Baptist Church?

Are we a saved church?

Are we a steadfast church?

Are we a soul-winning church?

Are we a second-coming church?

Are we a submissive church?