

1 Thessalonians 1 (3) – The Ministry of Confirmation

When you know someone who is learning a new skill, or taking up a new sport, or starting a new program at school, it makes you feel good to see them do good. Especially if it is something that you have learned to do. Painters like to see other people learn to paint. Weightlifters like to see others enjoying weightlifting. Horse riders like to see people learning to ride horses. A doctor is happy to see their child going into medical school. A veteran is encouraged to know that you are joining the military to serve our country and stand for our freedoms. Seeing people do what you did is a confirmation, a validation that you did something that was worth it.

This is so important. And this confirmation of worth works both ways. When you're the one who is doing the new thing, it is encouraging to see examples of those who have gone before you who ran the race well, or who are still going strong. Doing what others did and are still doing is a confirmation, a validation that you're doing something worth it, something that can last.

And this is the way it is in the kingdom of God. Believers are encouraged when they see others becoming believers. Disciples are encouraged to see people being discipled. And new converts are encouraged by those old saints who are still serving Jesus even after a long time and a hard road.

Our text today speaks of these truths. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had all spent a very limited time among the Thessalonians. Paul and Silas only about three weeks. And Timothy probably not more than a few months at most. But they saw enough, heard enough, and experienced enough to know what was going on, and how the Lord had saved them, and was growing them. And so, they knew how to thank God for them, and pray for them. And you can thank God for those you disciple who grow in the grace of God. And those you disciple can thank God for your genuine discipleship.

You see, with Paul, Silas, and Timothy, it wasn't just that they had ministered to the Thessalonians. By their ongoing testimony, the Thessalonians were

ministering to them. This was not just ministry from Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the Thessalonians, this was ministry from the Thessalonians to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Why? Because they became confirmation to one another.

Think of this in terms of a pastor and the congregation. It does me well to see you grow. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, the Apostle Paul says – *For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.* In Philippians 4:1, Paul says – *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.* In 3 John 4, the Apostle John says – *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* It does me well to see you grow. And it does you well to see me stay the course. In 1 Timothy 4:15-16, Paul said to Timothy – *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Confirmation isn't just about a pastor and his congregation. This is about all believers, one to another. It does others well to see you grow. And it does you well to see others stay the course. Genuine testimony is genuine ministry. 2 Corinthians 1:14 says – *on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.* When you see someone grow, you see that God is still doing his work in people. When you see someone stay the course over the long haul, you see that God is continuing to do his work in people.

And I'm not just talking about those who always stay perfectly upright on the straight and narrow path. I'm also talking about those who may veer back and forth, and up and down and all around the path. They slid back, but now they turn back, because God not only saved them, it is God who is keeping them. Amen! We need to continually see people who are turning back around to Jesus. Don't stay stuck. Throw your hands up in surrender, and Jesus will pull you out of your trouble and into his loving arms. He never let you go. Now is the time to feel his embrace. I know exactly what I am talking about. I'm a confirmation for you. That was me, that is me, and if that is you, come on back, we're all waiting for you.

You can learn, you can grow, you can improve. And you can turn to God in repentance and faith. So that, even when you're not really doing so well, you can show yourself to be a good example of how to get better. People need to see good examples of what repentance really looks like. To know how to get back up after falling down. This is a confirmation that God doesn't throw people onto the scrap heap of life. He pulls them off. Again, and again.

Confirmation is powerful. When you've been a believer for many years, it's a joy to see people coming to the faith. And when you're a new believer, it's a joy to see long time believers continuing in the faith. And everyone needs to see people turning back to the faith. Never discount the witness of God's ongoing work in peoples' lives. Expect it. Look for it. Be a part of it. And thank God for it. Those who are newer in the faith are an encouragement to those who are mature in the faith. And those who are seasoned in the faith are an example to those who are young in the faith. Especially in hardships. People need to see other people persevere through problems. Yes, we want to see victories, but even when we don't see victory, we don't have to play the victim, we can praise Jesus and know the Holy Spirit. It's a big deal to see people endure through big problems, praising God. It is a living ministry that we should be thankful to God for, and remember.

remembering before our God and Father – When someone means something important to you, it influences your prayers for them. When you feel like someone is your close brother or sister in Christ, it makes a difference in how you care in prayer. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were praying because they cared. And they were thanking God for what he had already done, and what was already going on. They remembered because it mattered.

Remembering God's faithfulness in the past gives us faith in the present and hope for our future. Every believer is called to remember God's work in their lives, and to rehearse these testimonies to one another. The Old Testament is full of exhortations for God's people to remember God's faithfulness to them in the past. And there are a lot of Old Testament scriptures that recall God's faithfulness to his people in the past.

The Israelites would set up stone pillars after God performed a miracle or helped them in some way (Genesis 28:18-22, 35:14-15 / Exodus 24:2-4 / Joshua 4:2-3, 8-9, 24:27). It was a physical reminder of God's faithfulness, a way to be encouraged, when doubt tried to tell them otherwise. And when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we remember what Christ has done for us, and we anticipate his return for us (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The means of grace are a vital part of the ministry of confirmation. God has given us signs of his promise, and seals of his approval. Baptism and the Lord's Supper give structure, form, order, and confirmation to the local church. Baptism is the initial sign and seal of your faith in Christ. And the Lord's Supper is the ongoing sign and seal of your faith in Christ. Baptism unites one to many, and the Lord's Supper unites the many as one. These are beautiful pictures and proclamations of our faith. They are a continual confirmation of God's work among us. Have faith in God's work.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had faith. They knew that God had worked among the Thessalonians. So, they know that God will continue to work among them. As Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6 – *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* And because they knew God was at work, they knew that God would cause the Thessalonians to work.

your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is beginning to explain what they are thankful to God for. Basically, he is saying that they were thankful that the Thessalonians were saved, and living like it. And Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted to tell the Thessalonians that they recognized the grace of God working in their lives, by recognizing the good things they saw when they were there, and heard about when they left. The work of God leads to the works of God's people.

your work of faith – God works the faith in us, and then that faith works itself out from us. Philippians 2:12-13 says – *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out*

your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 says – To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God that brings salvation manifests itself in faithful works. This is faith in God, which means faith in God’s Son, which means faith in God’s word. And this faith is lived out.

Your life demonstrates a work of faith. If you are truly saved, then you have a new nature, and you will follow a new direction. And when you stumble along the way, you’ll eventually receive correction, and get back up, and start following Jesus again. It is not about perfection, it is about direction, and this is a work of faith; where God works faith in you, and faith works for God from you. A saving faith leads to a living faith.

and labor of love – Their work of faith was characterized by labors of love. The grace of God that brings salvation manifests itself with believers working hard. In Colossians 1:29, Paul says – For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. This means giving it sincere effort, and enduring the toil of sometimes tedious or troubling work. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 says – For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. When you do something that may not be readily recognized or rewarded, and instead may be met with persecution, or other problems, but you do it because it is godly and right, you are doing it as a labor of love, a love for the Lord Jesus Christ and his people.

and steadfastness of hope – This is steadfastness to the faith marked by hope. The grace of God that brings salvation manifests itself in the perseverance of believers. 2 Corinthians 1:7 says – Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14 says – And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the

word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says – Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Colossians 1:3-5 says – We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

in our Lord Jesus Christ – Our hope is anchored in a person. The Thessalonians weren't focused on themselves or their performance or their current situations. The Thessalonians were sticking with Jesus. You see this evident in 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10. They Thessalonians firm to their conviction (vs.5), despite affliction (vs.6). They stayed focused on Jesus and kept moving forward, as an example to all (vs.7-8). They were going a new direction (vs.9). And they kept their eyes on their destination (vs.10).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were thankful for what they saw in the Thessalonians; the marks of faith, and love, and hope. It was obvious that they were living out what true Christianity looks like. These were the seeds of God's work in them bearing fruit.

When you see someone grow, you see that God is still doing his work in people. When you see someone stay the course over the long haul, you see that God is continuing to do his work in people. When you see someone turn back to Jesus, you see that God doesn't let his people go. Those who are newer in the faith are an encouragement to those who are mature in the faith. And those who are seasoned in the faith are an example to those who are young in the faith. And those who fall, but who get back up, this gives us a cause for praise unto God, who faithfully keeps his people even when they falter. We should remember that in our prayers to God, and with open thankfulness to each other. The ministry of confirmation is powerful. Expect it. Look for it. Be a part of it. And thank God for it. Amen.