

What is Church?

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Preached: 6/21/20 – Germantown; Series on the Church

Welcome and Greeting Welcome to our gathering today, this Father's Day weekend. We want to say to all dad's Happy Father's Day. I am glad that you have joined me today for this time of Worship and Study. I hope that our time together will be helpful and meaningful, and that it will bring glory to our Heavenly Father.

Isaiah 26:3 (NLT) – You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Message: What is Church? Part 2

Last weekend I began a series of sermon studies on the topic of the Church. **What is Church?** I mentioned that as we come out of a time when we haven't been meeting for our Sunday morning gatherings, and begin to resume some of our activities, that we have the opportunity to do some things differently than we have in the past. We have been restricted from doing the things that we have always done in the past because of the virus, so we need to ask ourselves questions about the reasons why we have done things in a certain way. Can we do things differently or better. Sometimes our lives get into ruts and we find ourselves just doing what we always do. That happens to Churches as well. We just follow the same path that we have always taken. Something big like a pandemic quarantine can jolt us out of the rut and we can forge a new path. Thom Ranier says it is like we now have a blank slate and we can paint a different picture of what we want our Churches to look like. To help us in this process of developing a newer or better picture of what we want our Church to look like, a good place to start is by looking at the Bible and learn about the purpose of the Church. As we are studying the purpose of the Church, we are looking at the 1st chapter of the book of 1 Thessalonians. As the apostle Paul is writing to this Church, he gives us some good information about the Church that we can take and apply where we are. Last week we looked at verse 1 and we learned that **the Church is an assembly of people who have a spiritual identity**. We are people who are loved by God and have been chosen by God. He has brought us together. We are not a club or a social gathering of people who have common interests.

Today we are moving on and looking at verses 2 – 5. The author of the book, the apostle Paul, had started this Church of the Thessalonians. Because of persecution in the city of Philippi, Paul escaped to Thessalonica. As was his custom, he went to the local synagogue and preached to those in attendance about Jesus. He did that for 3 weeks. He announced to the Jewish congregants that Jesus was the promised Messiah for the people of Israel. Some who heard him believed his message and were converted. But the Jewish religious leaders stirred up trouble and refused to allow Paul back in the synagogue. But those who accepted his message continued to meet together and formed this Church. Paul liked to stay connected with the Churches he started and he would often write letters to them to encourage them, or teach them. So that is the purpose of this letter. As Paul begins the letter, he affirms them and tells us that he loved this Church. **We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.** He then goes on to tell us what it was about this Church that he loved so much. In those words of affirmation, we learn about some characteristics that are important for Christians to develop and live out in the context of their Church. The Church of the Thessalonians was known for 3 characteristics:

- **Your work produced by faith**
- **Your labor prompted by love**
- **Your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ**

I want to look at these three characteristics and suggest to you that it would be great for any Church to be noted for these 3 things. Now remember, the Church is an assembly of people. So if a Church is going to be characterized by these 3 things then we as individual followers of Jesus need to be characterized by these things. A Church can't program itself to do these three things. The individual members of the Church must be committed to living out these things.

Your Work Produced by faith In the New Testament, Works and Faith are often discussed. Paul makes it clear that our salvation comes about by grace through faith. We are not brought into a right relationship with God by our own efforts – our own good deeds or works. God offers to us as a gift forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with Himself. You do not pay for a gift. It is given to you by a loving benefactor. We receive this gift from God through faith. We believe that God is giving us this gift made possible through the death of Jesus on the cross and we accept it. We believe that Jesus died for us and has forgiven our sins. So, where do “works” fit into the equation. Is there a place for doing good deeds. In Ephesians 2:8-10, Paul writes:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In verse 10, Paul says that when we are saved by grace through faith that we become God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. As Paul commends the Thessalonians, he expresses appreciation because their faith has produced good works. He does not tell us specifically what the good works are. It is likely that he is referring to acts of kindness and actions that were helpful and useful to others. Their work likely included missionary work – telling others about Jesus. Their good works were not just busy work. Their faith resulted in new behavior. So that now is a characteristic of effective Churches. Life does not go on as it always did before we came to faith in Jesus. Our lives are transformed and changed and we look for opportunities to put our faith into action by engaging in good works.

Labor prompted by Love. The second thing that Paul notes about the Thessalonians is that they were engaged in labor prompted by love. The word that is translated labor here does not refer to any specific action or work. It refers to an attitude or a spirit. The Thessalonians were engaged in wearisome labor for the gospel. It was exhausting. It was like strenuous wrestling. But they did not consider it to be a burden. Because their labor was motivated by Love. Recently New York Life has been airing a commercial on television. It’s a great commercial for students of the Bible. The commercial says that in the Greek language there are 4 words for love. The first word is **Philia** It is affection that grows from friendship. The second word is **Storge** – the kind you have for a grandparent or a sibling. The third word is **Eros** – the uncontrollable urge to say “I Love You”. Romantic Love. The fourth word is **Agape**. It is the most admirable. It is Love that takes an Action. Agape takes courage. It takes sacrifice. It takes strength. It is the word that is used to refer to the love that God has. It is the word that is used here in this verse. Leon Morris in his commentary on this passage says this:

When this love comes to a man he is faced with a challenge he cannot ignore. Once he comes to see that God is like that, that God loves as part of his very nature, that God loves us in a way which means Calvary, he must make a decision. Either he yields to the divine agape to be transformed by it, to be re-made in the divine image, to see men in a measure as God seems them, or he does not.

The Thessalonians had been captivated by God’s love for them, and now Paul recognizes that they are motivated to love others in the same way. That becomes the 2nd characteristic of an effective Church. The members of a Church engage in labor, wearisome labor, strenuous labor, for the gospel because they have been impacted by God’s love. The work of a Church depends on its members taking up the tasks that will bless others and honor God and enlarge the impact of the Church. Being a part of a Church involved more than Sunday mornings. It is a full time lifestyle.

Endurance inspired by hope. The third quality that came to characterize the Thessalonians was their endurance. The Thessalonian Church had come into existence in the fires of persecution. The Jewish leaders and the Roman officials raised their voices in opposition to the new believers. Some of the believers were arrested and dragged before the officials. They were imprisoned for their faith in Jesus and forced to post bond for their freedom. But these new Christians did not turn back, they did not give up their faith in Jesus. In verse 5 Paul says that when the Thessalonians came to faith in Jesus they had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Becoming a believer was not just a matter of adopting some new ideas. They experienced a deliverance from the power of darkness into the kingdom of light. Paul says that they were able to endure the persecution and threats because they had hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were willing to endure suffering and hardship for the sake of the gospel. They were not just sitting around being patient. But they

were convinced that Jesus was the Savior of the world and will one day be victorious. They knew they were on the right side. Have our hearts experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Are we convinced that in choosing to follow Jesus we have chosen the only way to eternal life.

So, members of the Church are people who are characterized by:

- **Works of kindness, compassion and an evangelistic zeal**
- **A tireless labor prompted by love for people as God loves people**
- **An endurance that holds unswervingly to the hope that we have in Jesus**

Are those qualities that characterize your life? As you live out those qualities, these will be qualities that characterize our Church.