



SEPTEMBER 26, 2021 | PASTOR TIMOTHY SONG

“Marks of a True Christian” (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell 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—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Good afternoon church. As you know, we’ve been going through a series in Acts. Pastor Ron got us to Acts 15 last Sunday. Today I will be starting a new series preaching from 1 Thessalonians. The reason why is that this is a letter written by Paul to the Christians in the Thessalonica church and I believe it’s important for us to hear how they lived out their faith.

The Thessalonians, like all believers, were called and chosen by God. That caused Apostle Paul to begin his first letter to them by giving thanks for God’s gift of their saving faith. The only way believers can discern whether someone is truly saved is by a renovated heart that transforms. Paul did not know who God has chosen, but he could see whose lives gave evidence of genuine salvation and it was evident to Paul of their genuineness.



As we looked at Paul in Acts (and other letters), he suffered constantly and extremely for the cause of Christ and he carried on his shoulders an overwhelming burden of responsibility and care for all the churches he planted and visited. He described his burden to the Corinthian church this way:

²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. **(2 Corinthians 11:24-28)**

Amidst such severe suffering, it must have been refreshing and exciting for Paul to minister to the Christians in Thessalonica. He was so encouraged by them and wanted to commend them for remaining faithful even though they were being persecuted and dealt with many hardships and struggles. As Paul (and Silas and Timothy) interacted with the believers, it was evident that they displayed many characteristics of true conversion and genuine salvation. They demonstrated how true Christians ought to live. As we open our bibles to 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, let us read and see what these marks of Christian living are. Follow along as I read.

[read text]

This is the word of God. Like Paul does in all of his letters, he opens with words of greeting for his friends in Thessalonica. He mentions that he, Silas and Timothy send greetings. All three men knew the Thessalonian believers very well as they founded the church there together. Timothy would later check up on how the church is doing and brought back a positive report to Paul (1 Thessalonians 3:6). Because this church was precious to all three men, Paul included his coworkers' names in the greeting.

As Paul continues, he says, "Grace and peace to you". John MacArthur wrote that "Grace is God's undeserved favour to the sinner in the form of complete forgiveness of sin and the granting of eternal life and peace is the result of that amazing gift of love." Paul desired for this church to continue to experience the fullness of God's grace and that they would experience peace with God and a peace in their hearts that always surpassed their human understanding (Phil. 4:7). We all need God's grace and peace each and other day. Grace to cover our sins and peace to alleviate our guilt. This greeting shows Paul's love for this church. So, it's understandable that he would start his letter with a prayer of thanksgiving in verse 2. He gives thanks to God for the believers in Thessalonica and they remember them and continue to pray for them. Why? We read in verse 3 and I want to focus today's sermon on this verse. What this verse does is it describes the life of a true Christian. I want to use the three markers/qualities mentioned in verse 3 as our three points for today:

1. A true Christian's work is produced by faith.
2. A true Christian's labour is prompted by love.
3. A true Christian's endurance is inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, let's begin with the first marker.



POINT #1: A TRUE CHRISTIAN'S WORK IS PRODUCED BY FAITH.

Paul gives thanks for the faith, love and hope manifested among the Thessalonian believers. These three qualities are linked together many times in the New Testament by early Christians and mentioned many times by Paul in his various letters. The first quality he writes about these believers is that their work is produced by faith. When Paul is emphasizing that salvation comes from faith and not at all from works, he can set faith and works in sharp contrast. We are justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Someone who is truly saved by faith in Jesus Christ will always result in the mighty work of God that produces change and transformation. A work of faith is action that represents transforming power that can only come through the Holy Spirit. Think of all the times the Holy Spirit came upon the early Christians and the result of power come upon them. Simply put, true Christians engage in the pursuit of holiness; in righteous deeds that honour God. Paul was so confident that the Thessalonian believers were truly converted because of their faith. Faith that is the authentic saving and sanctifying gift from God and there was evidence that this faith was producing righteous deeds in their lives.

Again, this must be clear: Paul is not contradicting his teaching that salvation is by faith alone apart from human works. In Romans 3:20-21 Paul writes, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin, but now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known..." Paul continues by saying, "and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood – to be received by FAITH" (Rom. 3:24-25).

However, while Paul insists that salvation is all of God, he also insists that faith is busy. There is an active side of faith. Salvation will produce holiness. Paul complements justification by faith alone through grace alone and works that flow from that saving faith. Romans 2:6-7 tells us that "God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life, but for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." This does not mean that people can earn salvation because of their good works. No, but rather, it means that those works, or righteous deeds, verify the trueness of their faith.

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, who God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:8-10). The reason a true Christian's work is produced by faith is because God is at work in them. All of us will sometimes disobey God's commands and fail to do His will. There will be times we do not produce good deeds and holiness, but true Christians will always long to obey and true Christians will manifest evidence of true spiritual fruit of obedience. Genuine saving faith is intimately connected to the obedience to God and His Word which leads to the work of faith that Paul so clearly saw in the Thessalonians. APPLICATION: Brothers and sisters, does our life reflect this saving faith? Are we working towards growing in holiness?

A true Christian's work is produced by faith. That's the first marker or quality. The second marker is that a true Christian's labour is prompted by love.



POINT #2: A TRUE CHRISTIAN'S LABOUR IS PROMPTED BY LOVE.

After Paul first writes about work produced by faith, he now turns to labour prompted by love. Labour is a much more intense word than work. It involves putting greater effort into that which you are doing. A mother who is in labour is a mother expecting great effort in delivering her child. Strenuous labour makes us weary and leaves us wanting to stop and rest.

Paul is speaking in this letter about the labour of the believers in Thessalonica for the sake of the Lord Jesus. It was not easy to be a Christian in this city. Great opposition arose against the believers, and we can only imagine how exhausting and demanding it would be to persist in serving Christ. The persecution was so great that Paul was afraid they would give up their new life in Jesus just to relieve the pressure.

Paul heard that they had not given up their faith, but instead carried on in their labour for Christ because of their love for Him. This love was so great that they refused to give up. They continued to labour for the gospel so that they “welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” (v.6) and they “became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (v.7). Because of their love for Him, they never became tired of speaking to others about their Saviour. Their love for Christ energized them daily in their labour for the Lord. APPLICATION:

It is love for God that motivates us in serving Him. If you don't love someone, you cannot serve them, for you won't find it in your heart to care for that person, but if you do love someone, you must love them unconditionally. The Lord Jesus has the perfect example of unconditional love when He came into this world. He did not give His life on the cross because we were such wonderful people. No, Christ Himself saw the hatred in the hearts of those who cried out, “Crucify Him!” as He was led to the cross and yet, He prayed to the Father for them saying, “Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

ILLUSTRATION: Think of someone you love the most. I recently got married, but when my wife would ask me how much I love her, I would answer her, “You're second on my list of who I love most: Jesus is number one”, but those are just words. Do I really believe and live that out? And when she asks me why I love her, I say this, and this is very genuine. I say, “I love you because I feel so loved by you”. Now, I know how that sounds. It sounds so selfish, but I didn't mean it that way and thought that was very genuine. When you know how much someone loves you, you can't help but to love that person the same way or more and when you love someone, you're willing to toil and labour, expecting hardships and putting in the effort, to love them. That's the same thing with Christ's love for us. Christ paid the ultimate price and sacrifice for each of us. His love led Him to the cross, but I must confess, and maybe you know in your hearts too, that His love doesn't compel us for some reason. Many times, we've lost sight of His love for us. The Gospel has become dry and dull.

However, here's the crazy thing about Christ's love for us: it did not depend on the fact that we loved Him in return, but Christ was determined to love us even though our condition was sinful. This is a love that we can never comprehend. It is Christ's love for us that makes it possible to love God and to love our neighbours today. If there is no love in your heart for what Christ has done for you on the cross, then you will quickly grow tired and weary in serving Him. Without love for the Lord, you have nothing to energize you in what God's plans are for you in how to serve Him. APPLICATION: What will motivate you to serve God and to fight against the sin and evil in your heart if love for the Lord does not live in you?

This love that God demonstrated is not a love of the worthy and it is not a love that desires to possess. No. It is a love that seeks to give. God loves, not because people are worthy of that love, but because He is that kind of God; it is in His nature to love. He is love (1 John 4:8,16). If you know that God has loved you in such a wonderful way, then what must follow is that you want to touch the lives of others with that same love.



Then you will not grow weary in doing good to those in need and you will not grow weary in testifying to the greatness, grace and love of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Love for our Saviour will prompt us to serve Him with our whole heart and life. A true Christian's labour is prompted by love. That's the second marker. The third marker is a true Christian's endurance is inspired by hope in Jesus Christ.

POINT #3: A TRUE CHRISTIAN'S ENDURANCE IS INSPIRED BY HOPE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Just as saving faith comes from God but also that same faith produces good works and how Christ's love for us prompts us to labour in our love for Him and others. Hope also has two sides. Paul connects the need for endurance to be inspired by hope in Jesus.

There will come a time in all of our lives where we go through dry seasons spiritually and these dry seasons can be a result of many things. It could be because there are hardships in life. We continue to live through this pandemic which may have caused people to lose jobs or make drastic adjustments to their lives. Mental health can play a huge role. Persecution for believers in Afghanistan and other nations around the world can cause some doubts or fear. Or it could be that we are living in sin and unrepentant causes our hearts to harden and turn away from God. For whatever reason it may be, the path of obedience is a life-long journey and what every Christian, and the Church, needs is keep going day by day, month by month, year by year, is endurance.

Endurance is needed especially when the highs and the joys of life seem like they've passed us by. Endurance is needed when there are emotional, relational, spiritual, financial obstacles that are right in front of us. What does God require of us when you are ill or sick? Endurance. What does He require of us when our marriages and families are wavering? Endurance. What does He require of us when we are burden by our work and the stress of making a living? Endurance. What does He require of us when we are called to go and proclaim Christ to a world in which, at best, is passive about Christ, and at worst, killing people for their faith? Endurance. God requires endurance. The Thessalonian Christians needed endurance amidst the suffering and persecution they were dealing with, but where does endurance come from? It comes from hope. Without the endurance inspired by hope, the work of faith and the labour of love will be difficult to live out. Without endurance, it'll be hard to see God at work.

John Piper asks this interesting question about endurance and hope of salvation: "Are Christians supposed to endure in the path of obedience in order to inherit the blessings of heaven, or are Christians supposed to endure because the blessings of heaven are certainly and infallibly theirs?" Asked another way, "Is endurance in the path of obedience to Christ a condition we must meet in order to obtain the inheritance of salvation, or is the inheritance of salvation already a guaranteed gift so that our confidence in it is what enables us to endure?"

Maybe this question is clearer or simpler: Is the message of the Gospel, "You must endure to the end in order to be saved", or is the message of the Gospel, "You shall endure to the end because you are saved"? What do you think the answer is? Well, the answer is yes to all. It's BOTH! Listen to what Piper says about this:

You must endure to the end in order to be saved and you shall endure precisely because you are saved. Salvation is both the reward of endurance, and the free gift of grace. We endure in order to inherit the blessings of heaven and because we are sure that the blessings of heaven are certainly ours.

It is so crucial that we find hope in the Word of God. There are two ways in which the Scriptures teach of the endure in hope: through God's promises and through His commands. Jeremiah 32:40 says, "I [God] will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me." Ezekiel 36:27 says, "I [God] will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws".



These are just two examples, but the Scriptures are filled with promises from God that He will do it! Endurance is a promised gift from God. We shall endure because of God's sovereign grace.

Going to the New Testament we read in Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God will do it! God kept Paul faithful and He will keep us faithful in the call He has for each of us. This is hope! Our hope lies in the One who saved us: Jesus Christ. In Him, who shed His blood for our sins, we are made new and promised an everlasting covenant and eternal life with God. Endurance is a gift and a guarantee of this that was sealed by the blood of Jesus for all who trust and believe in Him.

So, when you are feeling weak, tired, or weary, look to God's grace and power and rekindle our hope that we will endure because we cling to God's promises for us, but there is also a call to obey God's commands to endure and the result of obedience? The reward of salvation. Listen to what Paul says to the church in Rome: "God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, He will give eternal life" (Rom. 2:6-7). He says the same thing in Galatians 6:8-9 which says, "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest IF we do not give up." Endure in doing good and don't give up! We must endure to reap, or inherit, eternal life.

Last Bible passage. Hebrews 10:35-36 says, "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised." The reward and inheritance of salvation is given to those who endure in obedience to God's command and will.

Our endurance is inspired by hope in Jesus because it assures us that we will endure because we are saved, but we are also urged to endure so that we will be saved. Endurance is a gift and a duty. They do not contradict each other. God is a holy and sovereign God. We must endure to the end because He is holy, and we will endure to the end because He is sovereign and good.

When we look at the call to endure in hope, it teaches us to turn away from pride in thinking that we are the ones that can endure but look to the sovereign Lord and His power. The gift of salvation was bought by Christ. It is a gift that cannot be earned. We can't pay for salvation. It's about experiencing God's grace and living by faith and this hope also gives us confidence and peace that we can go to Jesus in our sinfulness and brokenness and find forgiveness, but this endurance inspired by hope in Christ also must come with change and transformation. You cannot stay the same. Perhaps some of us here are feeling stagnant in their faith. That's ok. It happens, but maybe God is trying to wake us up. Because true Christians must endure is anticipating the reward of heaven and valuing the things above rather whatever the world can provide and only then shall our hearts be rekindled with the hope of Christ and an endurance to obey and follow Him.

Brothers and sisters, these are the three markers and qualities that Paul saw in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica, and these are the same qualities that must mark our lives today as true Christians!



APPLICATION

As these marks of a true Christian become more and more evident in our lives, we should see these other markers mentioned in today's text:

1. A reception of the Gospel in power and the Holy Spirit (v.5),
 2. becoming imitators of Christ (bearing His name) (v.6),
 3. welcoming the message of Christ amidst suffering and receiving it with joy (v.6),
 4. becoming a model of Christ to one another (v.7),
 5. proclaiming the gospel so that it rings out like a trumpet or the roll of thunder (the resounding witness of the church) (v.8),
 6. turning to God from idols (from something that is dead to the living and true God) (v.9),
 7. and waiting for Jesus, the Son of God, to come again from heaven, knowing and clinging onto the hope that we have in Jesus in the final day of judgment (v.10).
- Does the Gospel ring out from us like this?
 - Be actively waiting and seeing
 - In order for our church to grow and mature, we must all submit to the Lord's plans for us and obey.
 - We must grow in faith, love, and hope.

Let's pray.