

Spiritual DNA: An Examination of the Church
A Church that Has a Faith that Works
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 3:1-10

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Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: Today, we turn our attention to looking at the DNA of a church. Churches come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. However, all churches must be characterized by faith, love, and hope. Remember those words from 1 Corinthians 13. Well, Paul knew of one church that seemed to hit its stride when coming to these three spiritual qualities.

One of the customary features of Paul's letters to churches is a prayer section. There is something in the prayer section at the beginning of this letter that really grabs the attention.

Text: Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy:

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

Grace to you and peace.

² We always thank God for all of you, remembering you constantly in our prayers. ³ We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ knowing your election, brothers loved by God. ⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. You know what kind of men we were among you for your benefit, ⁶ and you became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with the joy from the Holy Spirit. ⁷ As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ For the Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out, so we don't need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had from you: 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. (1:1-10)

¹ Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens. ² And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, ³ so that no one will be shaken by these persecutions. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we told you previously that we were going to suffer persecution, and as you know, it happened. ⁵ For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing. ⁶ But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love, and that you always have good memories of us, wanting to see us, as we also want to see you. ⁷ Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord. ⁹ How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience because of you before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith? (3:1-10)

Introduction—Notice verse 3. It sets the tone for this letter to the Thessalonians and therefore sets the tone for our study of the next three weeks. Paul praised God for this church while at the same time he praised this church for being a church with a work of faith, a labor of love, and a hope that lasts. That ought to be the spiritual DNA of every church. We will consider each of these qualities. Today, we want to highlight a church with a faith that works.

Here's the point. Sooner or later, we all have to face this question: "Will our faith work?" That is, faith is not really on display when everything is easy; faith is on display when everything is going wrong.

I love a story from the Old Testament that illustrates this point well. The story is about the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. In summary, here is Jeremiah's story as it relates to Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah was a prophet of God. Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of God, prophesied that a day was coming when the Babylonians would invade Judah. Jeremiah further prophesied that another day would come when a remnant would be restored to Israel. As is often the case for the messengers of God, Jeremiah's message was not well received and, as revealed in 32:2, Jeremiah is imprisoned for preaching this message of doom and gloom even though the Babylonian army is beginning the siege of Jerusalem. At that same time, God speaks to Jeremiah to reveal that he is going to have an offer to buy land. Don't miss the picture—Jeremiah is being asked to buy land that the enemy is about to claim. I believe this is God's way of asking Jeremiah whether Jeremiah really believes the promise of return. (32:25)

Again, sooner or later we are going to have to reveal whether we really have faith. You are going to have to do that in your personal life and collectively we are going to have to do that as a church.

Paul points us to a church in the Church at Thessalonica that had a faith that worked—a faith that revealed itself as faith. How can this faith be described? Well, first, notice that we can point to the roots of this faith.

The Roots of a Faith that Works

- **Authentic Conversion**

Let's be honest. The reason that some people and some churches have a faith that fizzles is that really they do not have authentic faith. As Paul described the faith of the Thessalonians, he describes an authentic faith. All of chapter 1 really (especially verse 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9) points to the authenticity of their faith. Their faith was true because their faith was in the true God. Verse 9 especially is worthy of our attention because it gives us the essence of true saving faith. A person must turn from a false god and serve the one true living God and wait for Jesus Christ. (a faith firmly rooted in Jesus Christ)

- **Continued Instruction**

Then the text reveals that these believers in Thessalonica were instructed in matters of faith. Look at 2:10-12 and 3:2, 3:10, and 3:13. Paul is concerned with completing what is lacking in their faith.

Conversion followed by continued instruction. Now, note that this is not just information, but transformation. The Thessalonians were not just becoming more knowledgeable, but becoming more transformed and their faith was increasing.

Authentic conversion accompanied with continued instruction is going to make a difference in a person's life. Charles Spurgeon, the famed preacher of London of another generation, had a friend named Newman Hall. Hall wrote a Gospel tract entitled *Come to Jesus*, which was translated into 13 different languages. Another pastor wrote a published article blasting Pastor Hall. After a while, Hall decided to respond to this criticism. His letter was retaliatory, filled with the same kind of vindictiveness of the article about him. Before sending the letter, Hall decided to ask his friend Spurgeon to read the letter. Reportedly, Spurgeon read the letter and remarked to Hall that the letter was well written and true, but lacked just one thing. "Underneath your signature," Spurgeon said, "you ought to write the words, 'Author of *Come to Jesus*.'" Spurgeon, with wisdom and gentleness had made his point. The two godly men together tore the letter to shreds.

We will have a faith that works first of all when we have an authentic faith in Jesus Christ. Now, consider the results of that kind of faith.

The Results of a Faith that Works

- Stands out in a Crowd

First of all, authentic faith is going to stand out in a crowd. Consider 1:8. Paul doesn't say exactly what the work was, but people knew. Such is the case with authentic faith. The history of the Church at Thessalonica is given in Acts 17. Interestingly, in Acts 17:6 the city officials said of the Christians there, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too."

- Stands up in affliction

This is Paul's main concern in 3:3. Perhaps one of the greatest things that could happen to reveal our faith is to experience affliction. This is the true test of faith.

- Stands against the temptation of Satan

This is Paul's main concern in 3:5. This goes back to our roots in faith. We are also reminded of Paul's words to the Church at Ephesus to put on the shield of faith so as to stand against the tactics of the Devil. There, Paul tells us to take up the shield of faith to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one.

- Stands in part because of the encouragement of others

This is a mutual encouragement. The church is encouraged by the investment being made in them. Paul is encouraged to know that the church is doing well.

Don't forget: Sooner or later your faith is going to be tested. When your faith is put under the microscope of examination, what will be found?