

2. What every church should be

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This epistle is full of interest because it is certainly among the first of those which have been preserved for us from the pen of the apostle Paul. It was the first he wrote to Thessalonica Christians, and in it, the fundamental things the Christian life and Christian church should be.

A. GREETINGS

1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul writes on behalf of his two companions – Silvanus, a.k.a. Silas, and Timothy, who had been with him in Thessalonica.

He himself founded the church in Thessalonica, the prosperous capital of the province of Macedonia which was in northern Greece, located on the famous Egnatian Way on his second missionary journey. He was only in the city for a short time because he was forced out by enemies of the Gospel. Yet the church of the Thessalonians continued alive and active.

B. AN ELECT PEOPLE – PREDESTINATION

1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

What do you get out of this?

There were things about the Christians in Thessalonica that Paul simply could not forget. He always remembered them. What he remembered about them, made him thankful to the Lord.

However, Paul's gratitude didn't come because all the Christians in Thessalonica thought so highly of him. Later, Paul used a whole chapter defending himself and his ministry against slander and false accusations.

Paul's gratitude didn't come because the Thessalonian Christians were morally impeccable. Later in the letter, Paul strongly warned them against the failings regarding sexual impurity.

Paul's gratitude didn't come because the Thessalonian Christians were completely accurate in all their doctrine. Later in the letter, Paul had to correct some of their wrong ideas in that area also.

Election by God means that these people and other born-again Christians are chosen by God.

The doctrine of divine election, a.k.a. Predestination doctrine confuses some people and frightens others. Trying to explain election is a good way to lose one's mind. But trying to ignore it is a good way to lose one's soul.

We will never completely understand the total concept of the election this side of heaven. But we should not ignore this important doctrine that is taught throughout the Bible.

Let's notice some obvious facts about the divine election:

1) Salvation begins with God.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

The entire plan of salvation was born in the heart of God long before man was created or the universe formed.

2) Salvation involves God's love.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Out of God's love for us, there are God's grace and mercy. God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve.

3) Salvation involves our faith.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

The Spirit of God used the Word of God to generate faith from those who are already chosen. It is the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

4) Salvation involves the Trinity.

While we grow in the Lord through the Bible, we get to learn that there is one God existing in three Persons: God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Keep in mind that all three Persons are involved in our salvation:

Father God knew in His infinite foreknowledge who are going to come to His Son Jesus before the beginning. So He sent His only begotten Son to die for us and the Son conquered death and rose again from the grave and sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. When the Word of God comes to an individual by the power of the Holy Spirit who teaches each one of us about the way of salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, that person accepts Jesus into his heart. Then the Holy Spirit comes into his heart and resides there and seals him with His own power as a deposit that guarantees eternal life in heaven.

This will help you escape dangerous extremes that either deny human responsibility or dilute divine sovereignty – because both are taught in the Bible. Human has a choice to accept God's offer for his life or reject to be doomed in hell. But God knew who is going to come to Him.

Some people believe that it is not necessary to go out to evangelize the world because those who are elected will be saved no matter what. Is that true? Absolutely, but if we don't get involved in the process of evangelism, we are ones who are missing out on a great move of God.

5) Salvation changes life.

How did Paul know that these Thessalonians were elected of God? He saw a change in their lives. If you put 1 Thessalonians 1:3 next to 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, we will get the picture.

Work of faithTurning to God from idols

Labor of loveServing the living and true God

Patience of hopeWaiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from

the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come

C. THE THREE PIECES OF EVIDENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Faith, hope, and love are the three cardinal virtues of the Christian life and the three greatest evidence of salvation.

1) Faith must always lead to works.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

We are not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works. If the Thessalonians had continued to worship their dead idols while professing faith in the living God, it would have proved that they were not among God's elect.

2) Love is an evidence of salvation.

We serve Christ because we love Him. This is the "labor of love" that Paul mentioned.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

3) Hope is an evidence of salvation.

We are waiting for Jesus Christ to return. The Return of Jesus Christ is the dominant theme of both of these Thessalonian letters. Unsaved people are not eagerly awaiting the Lord's return. In fact, they insist that there is no such thing as 'the Return of Jesus Christ', and even if there is, they don't want it.

D. THE GOSPEL THAT CHANGES PEOPLE'S LIVES

1 Thessalonians 1:5-8 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a matter of mere words. In modern culture, there is an overflow of information or entertainment that often only amounts to mere words. Yet the Gospel is more than words, it also has power and it has the power to change minds, hearts, and lives.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

When the Holy Spirit works through the word, a great spiritual work is accomplished. There is a spiritual work of God's Word that goes far beyond the basic educational value of learning the Bible.

It is a message given in much assurance. This describes the preacher who really believes what he preaches. There is no substitute for that assurance, and if a preacher doesn't have it, he should stay out of the pulpit.

When the Thessalonian Christians faced the affliction from receiving the Word, they didn't just face it with a resigned fatalism. They faced it with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, they encouraged other churches. Christians can either encourage or discourage each other. This principle applies also to churches. Churches must never compete with one another in a worldly manner, but they can encourage each other in love and do good works.

Sounded forth in v8 means "a loud ringing sound, as of a trumpet blast." The good work the Lord did among the Thessalonians became known all over the region, and everyone talked about the changes. That is my prayer for all of us in our church. I'd like to see the good work the Lord does among us become known all over Sahuarita and Green Valley, and everyone talks about the changes in us and they want the same.

E. HOPE IN CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and 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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

What do you see here?

When they worshiped idols, the Thessalonians had no hope. But when they trusted "the living God," they had a living hope. Those of you who have been brought up in the Christian doctrine cannot understand the bondage of pagan idolatry. But I do because I was born and raised in the culture where they worshipped either ancestors, buddha, or anything that could crawl, fly, or walk.

Psalm 115:4-9 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; 6 They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; 7 They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. 8 Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them. 9 O Israel, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield.

Christians are waiting for Jesus Christ, and He may return at any time. We are not waiting for any "signs", but we are waiting for the Savior. We are waiting for the redemption of the body and the hope of righteousness. When Jesus Christ returns we shall receive new bodies, and we shall be like Him. He will take us to the home He has prepared, and He will reward us for the service we have given in His name.

An individual church that truly lives in the expectation of seeing Jesus Christ at any time will be a vibrant and victorious group of people. Expecting the Lord's return is a great motivation for soul-winning and Christian stability.

F. APPLICATION

1) We must remember that we are elected by our God's grace, mercy, and love, not by our own goodness which is none.

2) We must exemplify work of hope, labor of love, and patience of hope in Christ to others.