

Spiritual Fruit

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Date: 09 September 2018

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[0 : 00] Our prayer for our time together in the study of 1 Thessalonians is that we get some opportunities! to be real with one another about where we are.

So that we take the truths of the scripture and we don't just banter them around and discuss the accuracy of our interpretation but that we take what we know and we actually put it to work. That's why we exist. We exist to be representatives of Jesus, not just to know what he says but to actually put it to work in our lives. And I think that's what's kind of refreshing to be honest with you when I look at this church of Thessalonica. I mean, we're talking about a church that is brand new. Paul is, it was only there for just a few weeks. We don't know exactly how long but he talks about in Acts chapter 17 that he only preached there for three weeks in the synagogue and then through the course of events was kind of propelled out of the city. In about six to ten months, maybe a year later, he writes this letter to this church. So they're no more than a year old at this point. And yet, here is a church that we can learn something from. This infant fledgling church has something to say to you. This infant fledgling church has this fresh zeal for Jesus that has absolutely transformed everything about their lives. Now certainly they're growing in their faith. They're growing in their knowledge but they're putting it to work. And that's what I want for my life and I'm sure that's what you want in your life as well. You want to be a person who knows the truth and reflects that truth to others around you. I want to point you to just a couple of things that we're going to be looking at through the course of this study. And in a couple of weeks from now, we're going to concentrate on the last part of chapter one. But I want to just point you there briefly for just a moment. Beginning in verse eight of chapter one. First Thessalonians chapter one, verse eight. If you're a guest with us this morning, it's on page 986 in the pew in front of you. I want you to see how transformational this church was. It says, for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Now when you think about the church and you think about the kind of impact that you want the church to have, you think that's a little how you would describe it? You want all of Columbus and perhaps all of Ohio to know and to recognize the wonder of the gospel so that no person is unaffected by that message and the testimony that you have had in their life because of this [3 : 43] Christ-exalting change that's taken place for you? Then if you turn to chapter four, you can begin to see this coming again.

Chapter four, verse nine says this, Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you. For you yourselves have been taught to God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

I mean, can you get it? Let's not forget, this church is only a year old and it is having this kind of impact.

The little truth they knew, they embraced. And what they embraced was so distinctive that the entire region of Macedonia and Achaia had at least heard the message of Jesus.

And all of the brothers and sisters in that entire region had been affected in some way by the outpouring of love from this church.

[5 : 01] This just blows me away. Because, frankly, I don't know that many people here, even in the other end of Trebu Road, knows that Maranatha exists.

It could be. But what about the churches in Worthington? What about the brothers and sisters who are in Toledo?

Is there the kind of impact that God is having for you personally that begins to affect the world around you?

It begins here. And then God begins to work the change in your life to begin to affect the people who see you. Because they're not seeing you anymore.

They're beginning to see Christ in you. That's what we're working towards. That's what we want. And that's, by the way, what Paul begins to commend here at the very outset of this letter.

[6 : 09] Because if you remember where Paul was before coming to Thessalonica, he was in Philippi. And you know what happened in Philippi.

Things were not very happy in Philippi. At least not towards the end. Paul and Silas were beaten for a service they did to this slave girl in casting out a demon.

And because the owners of this slave girl were no longer profiting off of her, they made an appeal and made a complaint and they were beaten and thrown in prison.

That didn't seem to faze Paul and Silas. Their backs bloodied in this prison cell.

And what do they do? They sing. They sing and praise the Lord and the Holy Spirit shakes the prison doors off their hinges.

[7 : 10] And a revival begins with the prison guard and his entire family. But as a result, Paul and Silas and Timothy have to make their way now to the next city. And they come their way to Thessalonica and things in Thessalonica aren't a whole lot better than they were in Philippi.

This entire region was experiencing a lot of the same upheaval. And so for the church of Thessalonica who was just beginning in their comprehension of the truth of the gospel is experiencing as a fledgling church some significant persecution.

So what does the heart of a pastor do to encourage himself when he knows the difficulties that are in store for these people he's begun to love and he knows the potential for disruption of faith to take place?

How does he encourage his heart? What does he point his attention to? What does he begin to emphasize and to draw out? Well we see that here in chapter 1 verses 1 to 3 and that's where we want to concentrate our attention this morning because these three words these three characteristics are not only the core characteristics of every believer but these are the things that he carries along through the course of the rest of this letter and begins to help shape and direct their attention to why these things are important for them as a body.

Let me read this for us and we'll begin in our study this morning. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of Thessalonica in God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ grace to you and peace.

[9 : 07] We give thanks to God always for all of you constantly mentioning you in our prayers remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're looking at the back you can easily fill in the outline as you read through these verses it's very clear where we're going in the flow of this study.

And it'd be easy for us just to talk about the significance of work excuse me the work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope. We know about faith hope and love.

Paul identifies these as kind of the core component of every true believer. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13 he says now abides faith hope love these three but the greatest of these is love.

We recognize that these are the main components that should represent every true believer. But I want to step through them one at a time today.

[10 : 19] I want us to take some moments not just to know what the truths are but maybe a bit different than what we've done in the past I want to give you some time to actually think it through for yourself.

How does God want you to be a more faithful person? But let's look at this together. First I want to talk about the fruit of faith.

I want to talk about the fruit of faith. He begins here by mentioning this work of faith. Now what should be going through your mind immediately the first question that should come to your mind is wait a second time out work of faith?

What does he mean by that? Because I know there are at least a couple of verses in the other parts of the scripture that would also use some same language and say that work and faith don't go together.

Right? And we understand the continuity of the scripture. We understand that the scripture does not contradict each other. So we have to begin to appreciate and understand the flow of what's taking place here in the context of the rest of the scripture.

[11:38] We can only come to appreciate and understand what the Bible says as we compare scripture to scripture. So what two verses would come to your mind about faith and works?

Probably Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 which says for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of your works it's a gift of God excuse me let me go back for by grace you say through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God not of works so that no one can boast.

So what do we find out about this? Faith stands alone. It comes only through the grace of God as a gift to those who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

There is no merit there is no worthiness in us there's nothing that we can do to achieve God's favor to get or receive God's favor in any way.

It is only the grace of God to us. Now a companion verse to that is in Titus chapter 3 verse 5 which says not by works of righteousness which you have done but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

[13:01] Now you may be asking yourself the question okay well it's the same English word but maybe it's a different Greek word that's there. Well I wish I could say it was that would make things really easy but it's not.

It's the same Greek word *ergon* that we find in all three verses here in 1 Thessalonians and those two as well. So what are we talking about? When we talk about the work of faith what are we referring to?

Well the Greek word itself actually only refers to a deed or an act an activity. We might say that it is it's a walk it's not necessarily a process but it is the expression of true faith in a life.

Paul uses it in 1 Thessalonians a couple of times when he talks about work. At the end of 1 Thessalonians he talks about esteem them speaking of your leaders very highly in love because of their work referring specifically to their deed their activity what they do in terms of labor for the church.

So to bring this together what is Paul talking about when he is referring to the work of faith? What he is referring to is the evidence of true faith showing up in your life and bearing witness of what you truly believe.

[14:41] In Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1 we find now faith is the evidence of things not seen. Faith your true faith shows up in how you live.

Now we spend a lot of time in 1 John talking about that. We use the phrase you are what you believe and what I mean by that is not that you can just believe anything you can believe that you can be a Christian and do all of these other things.

That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is there's a difference between what your confession of faith is and what you truly believe because it will actually work its way out in true living.

What you truly believe will show up in how you live. It's inescapable. And that's what Paul is talking about here. There is a component of faith a true component of faith that showed up in their life that produced something that was only possible because of God's work in their life.

we find from another source in James, not talking about Paul anymore, but now in the book of James, we find that faith without works is dead.

[16:08] And now we're beginning to understand that faith does create a measure of action in our life. That just because you have a certain belief system, just because you have a certain doctrine doesn't mean that you actually live your life according to that doctrine.

How many of us believe in the sovereignty of God? We know that God is always present with this omnipresence of God in the sovereignty of God in terms of his lordship of my life.

I ascribe those truths but then how often in a given week, even though I know that God is there, there is still this rebellion in my heart in relationship to my surroundings.

Or there's anxiety in my heart about what's taking place. Do I really believe that he's sovereign?

Well, I'm working to grow in my knowledge of who God is and committing that to my life but so often there is a disconnect from my confession of faith in what I actually demonstrate as the fruit of my life as a result of faith.

I want to just point out for our benefit the verses in 1 Thessalonians that point to faith to see how important this subject was to the Apostle Paul.

[17:44] We see it, of course, here in verse 3. But we also see it in chapter 1 verse 8. Notice what he says towards the end. He says, your faith towards God has gone out so that we do not need to say anything.

Now, how does doctrine go out? Well, it doesn't. That's what we're talking about. But what they truly believed showed up so remarkably in their life that all the people could talk about was, have you seen the church of Thessalonica?

It's amazing what God has done. Which pointed to the foundation of faith that they had, that led them to a certain activity.

It was visible because it produced action in their life. Chapter 3, verses 2 and 5 and 6 and 7 and 10 all talk about the significance of faith.

Paul is concerned about this church because he knows the adversity that they're confronted with and so he sends Timothy to find out about their faith and to encourage them to grow in their faith.

[19:09] faith. And when he hears about their true faith and Timothy brings a report back, this letter is the outflow of his enthusiasm.

He is bubbling with excitement because of the testimony of Timothy and the faith that has produced action in the lives of this church.

And perhaps the verse that we could go to for faith, hope, and love in this little epistle is in chapter 5 verse 8. Let me read that for us.

1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 8. Let those, excuse me, but let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breast plate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

not only is faith, love, and hope the beginnings of your experience in relationship with God but it is also the thing that will protect you and arm you against the dangers you will face in the Christian life.

[20:26] So let's begin to talk in practicality. How does God want to refine your faith today?

What is the evidence of faith in your life? As we will begin to or continue to look throughout 1 Thessalonians and as we are going to be encouraged to see how Paul sent Timothy to go help refine and strengthen the faith of this church, we are struck with the fact that faith must grow in every Christian life.

Faith cannot be stagnant. So, how does God want to increase your faith tomorrow?

What is God speaking into your life that he wants to change today? How has God been trying to get your attention?

Maybe over the past couple of weeks, maybe over the past couple of months, as you've been reading the scriptures, as you've been spending time in prayer, God has been tapping your shoulder and trying to inform your heart that something must change about you.

[21:47] And up to this point, for whatever reason, either it's not been convenient or it's just not felt very necessary, you've put it off. God can't walk us and step us into the next area of faith until we begin to be obedient in the initial steps.

How does God want to refine your faith today? What is that next step? How is he trying to realign your priorities?

How is he trying to move you to courage? How is he trying to help relieve those fears that you have, those pressures that mount from day to day? How does he want to move you to action?

The process of putting off and putting on. Well, perhaps one of the reasons why it's difficult to maybe even hear God's voice is because we're just not in tune with him.

I found that to be true in my own life so many times. Is the tempter, the evil one, the adversary of your soul, is he coming in the way of you listening to the voice of God?

[23:08] Are there areas of your life where you know there are clear mandates that you're just ignoring? Sin that has settled in and you've become comfortable with and you've decided, I just enjoy this a bit too much right now.

Well, that will certainly deafen the voice of God in your heart. Perhaps you are not in community with God's people on a regular basis as you should.

And what we'll find throughout scripture is God uses his people to often speak through his word to us. And one of the outlets of that for us is the small group experience.

And so I'm encouraged that this church has the small group so that we can grow in relationship and we can stir one another up to love and good deeds. There is accountability.

There is conversation. There is perhaps sometimes confrontation that happens there. But it's all a grace to you and a grace to me when that happens.

[24 : 13] We've got to move from the step of knowing to the step of acting. how does God want to grow your faith today? He doesn't end there.

He's delighted not only by their faith. He is not only ecstatic about what he sees in terms of authentic genuine faith but that faith is reinforced with love.

He says their work of faith and their labor of love. So now we move to the fruit of love. What does that look like?

How does that show up? Well when he uses this word labor he's referring to work and trouble and difficulty. It is often associated with striking and beating of the breasts, wailing and grieving. It's used to denote not so much the actual exertion but the weariness that is involved in the process. Have you ever felt weary in love?

[25 : 26] Is love work for you? Oh man. Love is work isn't it? And love is messy sometimes.

Love gets complicated at times. And I think so often in my own life I'm just scratching the surface when it comes to what real love looks like.

Because I'm not getting to the place where Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount where he says love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you, pray for them who spitefully use you.

I mean I'm not there yet. I'm having a hard enough time at the introductory process of just loving the people around me. even sometimes loving the people in my own family.

Because love is hard. But somehow this church however new they were, however immature they were in their understanding of the scripture, what they knew they put to work.

[26 : 34] So that he can make this statement in chapter 4. That all the brothers in Macedonia have been affected in some way by their love. That is incomprehensible to me.

But by the way, Paul wasn't satisfied even with that amount of love. Because he commands their love to abound more and more. So what are we talking about when we talk about true Christian love?

Well we've spent a lot of time in 1 John talking about love, haven't we? Let me just for the sake of reminder, I want to tell you what love is not like.

Because our world has a warped view of love. Their love is temporary. Their love is conditional. Their love is fickle.

It kind of comes and goes as it pleases. Their love is self-serving. It has its own purposes in mind. As long as my needs are met, my feelings aren't hurt, then there's an appropriate give and take.

[27 : 40] But when that ends, then my love for you is gone. Only up to a point where I decide to love you. The world's love is willing to sever.

It's willing to cut off. It's willing to dissociate oneself from others. It holds grudges. It's bitter. It's unwilling to forgive.

forgive. The world's love gets even. You hurt me and I'll get you back. The world's love angles for position.

How does this relationship get me where I want to go? How does it fill a supposed need that I have for myself? But that's not the kind of love that we found in 1 John, is it?

That kind of love is a love that pursues. It's a love that initiates. It's a love that goes after it. It takes the first step.

[28 : 39] It's a love that endures. We find love suffers long and is kind. We find in the scripture that love covers a multitude of sins. We also know that love seeks the best.

It looks for the best in others. It seeks to identify what is truly good about another individual. That's what I love about the apostle Paul, by the way. I mean, how is it that he opens this letter and the expression of his heart is one of thanksgiving for this church that is certainly dysfunctional in many ways.

And yet, in the opening phrase, you would never know it because he says, we give thanks to God always for you. It is just the overwhelming expression of our thoughts towards you, our thanksgiving.

He was able to be thankful because he saw God in them. He saw true faith.

He saw true love. And he sees this steadfastness of hope that we'll get to in just a moment here.

And because he saw God in them, he knew that they were secure.

[29 : 48] And he knew that God had it covered. That God had begun a good work in them, he would complete it. So, how about us? Are you really good at pointing out the flaws in other individuals?

Or are you good at affirming the best? That's hard, isn't it? But that's what godly love does. It looks for and identifies and affirms the good in others.

Love serves. The Son of Man came to serve and not to be served, but to give a life as a ransom for many. I was talking to somebody the other day who is in a situation, not where necessarily the people that they're interacting with is hard, but that they are always giving away.

There's always an expending of self. There's never a filling up. There's no sense of others pouring back in what has been depleted from them.

That makes love very difficult too. Those of you who are stay-at-home moms or those of you who are single parents, those of you who are the only believers in your family, you know something about giving and giving and giving and giving and giving and giving with very little or nothing coming back.

[31 : 15] but that is the true heart of love because as our Savior loved, there's always this expression of to serve.

I am here to serve you and I will then trust God that he will give me what I need because my God shall supply all my needs according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

Do you believe that? We give lip service to that truth so many times but when it comes to actually showing up to expend self time and time again, sometimes we just say, I just need some help here. And I think that's a legitimate desire but but who do we look for to fill the tanks when the reservoir has gone dry? We must look to Christ.

So what is the evidence of love in your life? How does God want to refine your love today? Maybe like me, God has to begin to work a little prejudice out of your heart.

[32 : 34] Maybe God has to create in you a burden for the lost. A deeper sense of love for the people who don't know Christ around you.

By the way, you can pray for us because Sarah and I tonight are going to be going to a Muslim wedding. So that will be an experience. And I pray that God uses that experience to continue to grow us in our relationships with our neighbors and to give us a greater tenderness to that group of individuals.

As we seek to move into places that are uncomfortable, then we can trust that God will help to cultivate in us what we see is missing. But only when we walk in obedience and we let him work. That's the only way it's going to happen. when God speaks to your heart that you say, your will be done. Finally, the fruit of hope.

The fruit of hope. We see that here. The steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Steadfastness is the word for endurance or perseverance.

[33 : 51] It's in contrast to the word for patience or long suffering. This word is associated with hope and refers to the quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial.

This is the word of endurance. The word of somebody who is going to go the distance no matter the cost. It's not that you're putting up with the hardship around you but there is a resoluteness about you.

I am seeing this through and I am relying on the strength of God to carry me to the finish line. It's only found here in 1 Thessalonians but it's used extensively through all of Paul's letters.

This was a significant quality that Paul repeatedly points to. He does refer to hope on numerous occasions things in 1 Thessalonians and I want us to understand that when the Bible talks about hope it's not talking about a wish it's not talking about a possibility it's not talking about oh there might be a chance that something might happen no when the Bible is talking about hope it's talking about certain expectancy.

I know this will happen because I know the God who has made this promise and I'm just going to wait for him in his timing to accomplish his purposes in this situation.

[35 : 30] It may not necessarily be for my benefit at least not my temporary benefit but it may have future benefit to the kingdom and I'm okay with that. I want to be used of God and trust him in difficulty to accomplish his purposes in his way.

So what is the evidence of hope in your life? Is there a steadfastness? Is there a hanging on to God?

Are you looking to him for answers to the deep questions of your life and trusting that he has the future locked in and you don't have to know all of the answers but that you can trust in the one answer that matters and that is that God has it under control and that he will give you the strength to overcome? Are there anxieties in your life? Are there fears? Is there a working the system because there's a bit of impatience for you?

You've been waiting a long time but God hasn't seemed to show up yet and so you need to help him out a little bit. Well those who truly hope are those who are willing to wait.

[36 : 43] is hope creating an expectation for heaven? Can you say with the apostle Paul for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Is there an urgency in your life to use and to maximize your time for the sake of Christ? Is there hope in him in your life today?

Let's pray.