

God's Workmanship

Call to Worship: Psalm 118:1-4

1st Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Hymn Insert- *Come People of the Risen King*

Hymn #401- *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

Hymn #705- *Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord*

Introduction:

After greeting the church, with a much needed reminder of God's ongoing grace and peace toward them, Paul reveals to them that he (and Silas and Timothy) constantly give thanks to God for them, as they continually make mention of them in their prayers. And there are three constant reminders, which serve as the primary motivations for these thanks offered to God on behalf of the Thessalonian church.

For this morning then, we will consider these three reminders, which have helped Paul, Timothy and Silas, to pray intelligently and fervently for this church, and the great reality, which these three reminders affirm.

I. Three Motivational Reminders

1) Their Work of Faith: Paul is able to thank God continually for the Thessalonian church, because of their work of faith. Now, brethren, what Paul is *not* saying here, is that, which sadly, several people in our day have claimed about faith, namely, that it is a work. Indeed, some people have gone so far as to deny the necessity of faith for justification, because they claim that faith itself is a work, and therefore, we cannot be justified by our faith even. However, Paul is not calling faith a work here, or anywhere else.

What Paul is saying is that he is thankful for the faith of the Thessalonians, because it is a living and proven faith, which is confirmed by the works that proceed out of it. The inward reality of the sincere faith of the Thessalonians is confirmed by the out-working of that inward faith, by the works that follow. And so, the authentication of the pulse of their faith is confirmed by their works, and Paul is thrilled to have heard about this, and he thanks God continually for it.

Last Sunday evening, our brother Herbert preached an excellent message on justification by faith alone, and he spent much time showing what James meant by our faith being justified by

our works, as authentic or not. I want to highly suggest that you listen to that sermon (at sermonaudio.com) if you were not here, as he does a fine job of opening up how Paul and James speak harmoniously, regarding their comments about faith and works.

And so, here, especially in a context of great persecution and opposition, Paul expresses how he thanks God for the evidence and fruit of a living faith, found in the Thessalonians. How they pursued holiness; how they were unwilling to compromise the Gospel; how they continued to build and edify the church; how they advanced the kingdom of Christ through evangelistic outreach to their pagan countrymen... and all of this, in the face of great and continuous opposition, filled Paul's heart with thanks to God.

2) Their Labor of Love: Paul is able to thank God continually for the Thessalonian church, because of their labor of love. Sprinting out of, and included in their work of faith, was an atmosphere of sincere, heartfelt, sacrificial, mutual love. And this love extended beyond the borders of their own local church even! [See also 1 Thess. 4:9-10]

The Thessalonians, again, in the face of great opposition and persecution, where it would be very tempting to just shack up and preserve your own life, they sacrificially loved and served one another. They strove to fulfill the royal law of Christ, to love one another, even as Christ has loved us. They took a genuine interest in each other; their eyes were fixed outward on the needs of their brethren, and they sought to meet those needs, in so far as they were able. They loved not merely in word, but in deed and in truth. Time, resources, finances, sweat, comfort, ease...etc, were all sacrificed for the betterment and growth of the body. And all of this, again, was a testimony to the fact that they really believed the Gospel! Their faith had a heartbeat! It said, "I believe that Christ, who was rich, became poor, so that I could be eternally rich in Him, and because I believe this, I lay down my life for His cause. And His cause is His sheep/church. And therefore, I lay down my own comfort and natural desires for the sake of His church!

3) Their Patience of Hope in Our Lord Jesus Christ: Paul is able to thank God continually for the Thessalonian church, because of their patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had a vested interest in the hope that was to come, in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would return for His people, to bring them to where He is, in glory! They knew that He had already prepared a place for them by His cross; that their names were written on His

pierced hands, and that, He would return again, and gather them to Himself to be with Him, where He is, in the eternal presence of the glory of His Father.

The label of "patience" was so suited to describe this reality, because in the present, they endured hardship, persecution, loss of loved ones, loss of possessions...etc. But, all of these they endured for the greater glory and blessed hope to come! They patiently waited for it. To be sure, there was resistance and pressure and a powerful opposing force, but they trudged forward and kept the faith, keeping their eye on the prize.

a- With Paul, they sought to "fight the good fight," and to "finish the race," and to "keep the faith," remembering that there was a crown of righteousness laid up for them, to be given them by the Righteous Judge of all the earth, on that coming Day!

b- With the patriarchs of old, they clung to the promises; certain solid promises, granted by a God who cannot lie, which, though having not yet been realized, would be realized soon enough! That is the Christian hope! Certain, rock solid, unbudging... not yet here, but most certainly coming!

And all of this: Their work of faith, their labor of love and their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, was done in the sight of their God and Father. Under the throes of ongoing persecution and trial, it can be easy to forget that God never forgets! God sees! God knows! None of their labors in the Lord were done in vain. They are ever acknowledged and watched by their almighty, omnipotent God, who was working all things; all of their painful trials, together for the sanctifying good of the Thessalonians. As their God, no matter what the threat of man, He would never allow them to slip through the cracks. He was with them and for them. And as their loving Father, they were the apple of His eye. His loving care and concern were constantly directed toward them, no matter what they presently felt, in the context of very difficult and painful trials. No, He has not forgotten even Job, but His loving and favorable eye was ever upon Him, using even the wicked afflictions of the devil for his good.

II. God's Workmanship

Now brethren, the question that must be begged then is, "Why is Paul *thanking God* for the faithfulness of the Thessalonians?" If this is their "work of faith," "labor of love," and "patience of hope," why thank God for *their* obedience? Why not just commend them?

He thanks God, because these very fruits, exhibited by the Thessalonians, are actually works that affirm the Holy Spirit's presence and work in and by them. For, it is God, who is at work in them, to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Left to themselves, the Thessalonians would not, and could not do anything that pleases God. This is God's work in and by them, confirming, in fact, that God has elected them unto salvation and eternal life. Notice, what Paul says in verse 4, "...knowing ***beloved*** brethren, your election by God." You see, Paul is thankful to God because He is affirming His salvific grace toward the Thessalonians, by leading them to bear the fruits that are mentioned in verse 3. The willingness of this church to stand firm and to bring forth fruit, in the face of great persecution (unto the threat of their very lives), shows that the hand of God is truly upon them. And that is why all thanks, from Paul, go right to God.

Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

III. Concluding Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through the text then, brethren, let us conclude our time by considering a few relevant closing thoughts and applications:

1) Consider that one of the things for which the Apostle Paul was thankful, and for which he continuously gave thanks to God, was the progress and fruit that was attained by others. Now, we all know that it is right and proper to give thanks to God, daily. And there are many things, for which, we ought to be thankful: creation, health, salvation, providential care, family, job, church...etc. But, how often do we consider the appropriate need to give thanks to God for the spiritual growth and progress that we see in others? [Again, presumes taking an interest in and knowing each other]

*Romans 1:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:4ff; Philippians 1:3-7; Col. 1:3ff; 1 Thess. 1:2-4; 2 Thess. 1:3ff

2) Brethren, recognize again that God never forgets your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. He sees and He knows and He has not forgotten. It is all done "in the sight of our God and Father!" And I say this, and I believe that Paul says it, at least in part, because it is so easy (for all of us) to lose sight of this, when we are going through difficult trials. We have to be prepared to not necessarily feel the presence of God; to perhaps even "feel" as if God doesn't acknowledge us, when we go through the fire. We have to be prepared to remind ourselves of the objective truth, that God sees and He cares. God never, even for a moment, failed to love and care for Job. But From every physical standpoint; from the standpoint of Job's senses, it seemed as if God did not care. In Asaph's afflictions, it seemed as if God was against Him, until he went into the house of the Lord. Brethren, what we see and feel and experience in this life and in this flesh, is not the end of the story!

If we forget this, we will be tempted to turn away from God and toward some form of idolatry. Like Christ, let us set our faces like a flint and head to Jerusalem, ready to bear our crosses, pushing forward until we get to the other side of this life. And there, we will find that God has never left us nor forsaken us! Our salvation draws nigh, brethren! Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life! The crown of glory awaits us! [See 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4 as well. Still going on, yet they stayed the course... Will we? Will the Son of Man find such faith, when He returns?]. [Note: They had faith, hope and love: the top virtues - 1 Cor. 13]

3) Rejoice in the privilege of being one of God's elect in Christ! You're a sinner, naturally condemned in Adam. Your guilt has come out and God's Law condemns you! But, you have been graciously chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world! And now, you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus! All that you do and desire in the Gospel, is God created and stirred! The Creator of all things has stepped into your world of sin; He has reached into the pit of hell and pulled you out, bathed you in His grace, and made you His beloved child! Bask in that! Rejoice in that, and let it be known!

4) To the unbeliever, you are ultimately a fruitless tree in this life, planted in the desert of this corrupt, defiled and dying world...

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!