

**1 Thessalonians 1: 1; "Grace and Peace to the Church", Sermon # 2 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 20th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We began last week, in the study of this letter, by looking at the missionary men that planted this church; Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Now this week we will begin to look at the church at Thessalonica itself. I would like each of us to come to understand more about the Biblical truth of the concept of the local church. The word "church" here in this first verse is the common word used in the Greek, for the local church, "ecclesia". There is, according to the Bible, a Universal Church which is composed of all the Elect in all ages, God's saints in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. It is spoken of in such famous verses as Ephesians 1: 22 and 23, when Paul says, "And He put all things under Christ's feet, and gave Him to be head over all things the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." And the Lord Jesus referred to His Church Universal when he said in Matthew 16: 18 to the Apostle Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." When I make mention of the invisible church, I am not referring to any of God's people now living upon the earth. I am referring to those spirits of just men made perfect which now surround the throne of God who are awaiting the completion of Christ's church and the Day of the resurrection of the dead, the Day when they and all of Christ's Church shall be physically visible to one another again. When I refer to the visible Church I am referring to those saints of God and Christ here upon the earth at this point in human history. Christ is the Head of His Church Universal, both visible and invisible, in heaven and earth. All of His saints are visible to Him in heaven and upon the earth. That is the Universal Church.

Then there is the local church. These are Christians, God's true people who worship Him in Spirit and Truth, who are in various geographic local churches. They belong to different denominations and hold to different creeds, but they are the individual assemblies that make up this visible world-wide Church. There are some believers in Jesus Christ who are, no doubt, more orthodox than others; some who really should leave the church that they have gone to for years because they were never saved by the doctrines which that church holds to and teaches. They cannot have life through false doctrines and they cannot grow as a Christian by listening to doctrines which are a watered-down or weak version of the truth of the Word of God. This is why you and I need to hear this sermon on the subject of the local church. It is because we want to promote the truth which the Bible teaches about the importance and significance of the local church in God's sight.

Men may plant and water local churches, but it is only God who builds and gives the increase. Men may be in Christ, but not see their need, or God's expectation, that they identify themselves with a local church. It is a very sad and God dishonoring thing when a person, as a true Christian will not join a local church and will not attempt to reach out and do anything in relation to other Christians in living their Christian life. The Bible speaks most definitely about discipleship. It speaks about the Christian responsibility to love and serve one another in living the Christian life. These commandments are really only fulfilled when we are part of a local church and in right relationship with a body of believers, as the Bible tells us in the letters of Paul and shows us examples of, in the book of Acts.

The word "church" as it is spoken of here in this verse, means an assembly of those who have been called by the gospel to worship God together, in accordance with His blessed word, the Bible; those who meet together, not only to be taught the Word of God, but also in order that they might become doers of that Word and thus bring glory to His name. In order for a church to be a true local church and to accomplish this purpose, each and every person who is a member of that church needs to know grace and peace coming to them from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Paul begins this letter in this way. The question that should naturally come to our minds is; " Why is it absolutely necessary for a local church to have grace and peace from God to be a true church in order to glorify God? And the answer is, that it is absolutely necessary for a local church to have grace and peace for the following reasons. 1st- Because without grace a local church is not "in" God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And 2nd- Because without peace a local church will not be able to bring glory to God and become doers of God's Word. Let's think for a few minutes about these points.

**1st- It is absolutely necessary for a local church to have grace because without it, that church is not "in" God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

This is a very unusual expression; to find the Apostle Paul writing about a local church as being "in" God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He usually speaks of individual believers as being in God and in Christ. Here he speaks of the church as a unit, and says that they are all "in" God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is very confident of their being a body of true believers. He is going to elaborate the reasons why he believes this in verses 3-10 of this first chapter. I will speak to you of those reasons as we come to those verses. But the point that he is making here is that it is entirely possible for churches to exist, and for people in those churches to say that they are Christian, but in God's sight, and in the eyes of discerning Christians, a good many of the people in those churches are not Christians, because they do not know what grace from God and peace from God mean. If you were to ask them what the words grace and peace mean, as they are

used in the Bible, they would not be able to explain it to you. Now this is a very serious thing not to know the definition of the Bible words, "grace and peace." For a church to be "in" God the Father means that each of the members of that church have believed God's testimony concerning His Son which is found in the Bible and more specifically in the gospel. Turn with me to 1 John 5: 9-12. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son." "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son." "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." So we see here, that to believe in the gospel with saving faith is to believe in the testimony which God has given. Therefore each one who truly does this, with their heart, is said to be "in" Christ.

To have saving faith is to be given the grace to have your eyes spiritually opened to your see your need of Christ's dying for your sins in particular. All men because of Adam's sin are sinners and under the wrath of God. We are children of wrath by nature and we will certainly perish unless we repent of our sins and believe in the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for sinners. To savingly believe is to trust in Christ with God's grace at work in your soul. It is not merely an assent to the fact that God is real and Christ is the Savior of the World in some general sense. It is having your heart opened to respond to the things of the gospel which have been spoken to you and shared with you. To be "in" Christ is to be "in" the Father also. To be in spiritual union with Jesus Christ means that you are in union with the Father also. In fact you are in union with the Triune God to save you from your sins and to bless you with every spiritual blessing that God has for you in Christ. The truth of grace, in terms of an individual's need of it, and a church's need of it is something that must be revealed to men. It is the reality of grace for which the Lord Jesus laid down His life. Grace is God's favor shown to sinners when they have broken His commandments and have ignored and neglected His Word. Grace is God's work in our hearts to take away the guilt and pollution of sin and His help to us, by the power of His Holy Spirit to change the loves of our life. Before we come to Christ we love many things which are sinful. We have other gods besides God; we place many things before Him in terms of what we give our time, strength, and attention to. Sometimes people do change outwardly. They reform their life to bring it in line with what is generally moral and good, but they do not think that they need to be saved from their sins. They attend churches who praise them for the good things that they are doing for other people. It is not wrong to do those good things, but it is not the way to come to know God. Many people think that going to church is not so much a means of

grace, the gathering together around the Word for regular stated times of worship. They think about it in terms of their being religious and they come to believe that their commitment to their church automatically insures their salvation. This is simply not true.

Let's look at another passage of Scripture to confirm this. Turn over to John 17 with me. What does it mean to be in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ? In verse 3 Jesus says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Jesus goes on to say in verse 4, "I have glorified You on the earth." "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." "And now glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." You see the great unity of purpose in the Godhead when Jesus prays this way. "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave given Me out of the world." "They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept your word. You see, salvation is not to be obtained by a commitment to just any church. It is to be obtained by believing God's testimony found in His Word and then keeping that word in relation to God and other believers. "Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You." "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me." "I pray for them." "I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." "And all Mine are yours and Yours are mine, and I am glorified in them." This, I am saying, is what it means for a local church to be "in" God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It means understanding that salvation was never of ourselves or our doing. We were totally unworthy of the least revelation of grace. But when our eyes and our hearts were opened by grace to respond to the gospel, we immediately also became very concerned to "keep God's Word." We saw the need to be taught the Bible by pastors and teachers. We saw the need to be kept from the evil one and to be sanctified by grace as well as being justified by grace. Jesus prays for these very things. Verse 14 says, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." "Sanctify them by Your truth." "Your word is truth." What should we conclude from these verses? We should conclude that a true church is not of this world. It does not promote the world's things or the things of the flesh. It promotes true worship and teaches men by the power of the Holy Spirit to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil age. All of this requires grace working in each and every member.

**2ndly- It is absolutely necessary that a local church have peace because without it, it cannot bring glory to God by its works.**

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." A local church must have peace from God in order to really do things to God's glory. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14: 17) It goes on to say there, "For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men." "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." The church that we attend must be a place where people can come and find peace with God, and find peace ruling in our hearts in our relationships with one another. Otherwise God is not honored and truth cannot go forward to conquer in many hearts. Jesus Christ is the prince of Peace. Having believed in Him we have peace with God. But the fact that His death would bring peace was and is the plan of the Father. Colossians 1: 19 and following says, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace by the blood of His cross. All sinful persons who trust in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ come to know this peace with God. God the Father purposes to give peace to sinful men because of Jesus' finished work on the cross. He is pleased to reconcile us to Himself through Jesus Christ. "The chastisement for our peace fell upon Him," it says in Isaiah 53: 5. Do you have this peace? It is not only a good blessing flowing from God to you, for Christ's sake. It is a good blessing flowing through you to other people in this local church.

Jesus Christ not only establishes peace between God the Father and sinful men, but He also gives grace to every Christian to seek peace and reconciliation with people who he is not getting along with in the local church. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God," Jesus says in Matthew 5: 9. In fact, God's grace works greatly in the true Christian to encourage the pursuit of peace, by each Christian, with all men. "Pursue peace with all men," it says in Hebrews 12: 14, "and the holiness without which no man will see the Lord." We must have peace with God, first, to begin to pursue peace with all men and to be reconciled to them. We must have the peace of God, and the grace of peace working in our hearts, in order to make peace with people who have somehow become our enemies. "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." This is why Paul says "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Christian is one who is learning by grace, not to think of things simply from the standpoint of His own observations and conclusions only. He is one who is deliberately trying to think of things from the standpoint of others also, without falling into their sinful attitudes or doing the same sinful things that they may have done to him. This is seeking

peace. There is a very definite connection between a man's following after righteousness, seeking to live a blameless life before God and man, and having peace. "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble."(Psalm 119: 165) And Psalm 37: 37 - "Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace." "But transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off." If we as a local church will covenant together to pray for this kind of grace and to seek for this kind of peace, we shall find that we will be glorifying to God in our words and our works. "Now may the God of peace, who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever." "Amen."