

## Lighthouse Bible Church

February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1: 1 – 4 *Scripture Reading: Acts 17: 1 - 9*

‘An Example Church to Follow’ #1

### Stand – Read – Pray

We are going to begin a study in the book of First Thessalonians because it is one of those books that speaks very directly to what an example church is to be and to how the people of that church are to live. And by looking at this example church in Thessalonica, we can then look at our church and see how we compare and see what we are doing right, what we need to improve on or what we need to change so that we can be or continue to be that example church as well.

Because, if you think about it, what do we have to compare ourselves to, to see if we are an example church or not. We can compare ourselves to other churches in our community or to big television churches and try to gauge whether or not we are an example church. But how do we know that the churches we are comparing ourselves to are a biblical or example church anyway.

What we can do, is look into the Word of God at those churches that are truly example churches and do our best to emulate them. Because we, as a called out body of believers which is what a church is, are to be as **1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3: 15** says **the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.**

The church is such a vital part of God’s plan of redemption, so we want to be the very best church that we can be.

Remember what the Apostle Paul said in **Acts 20: 28** **shepherd the CHURCH of God which He purchased with His own blood.** That is how important the church is to God and it means everything to Him, even the sacrifice and shed blood of His own Son Jesus Christ.

That is why **Ephesians 5: 24 - 29** says that the **church is subject to Christ because Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her and He nourishes it and cherishes it.**

Why is the church so important? Well, for a lot of reasons but in **Ephesians 3: 10** the church is to **make know the manifold wisdom of God**, through the proclamation of the gospel and the salvation of souls and the glorifying and praising and worshipping of God through the avenue of the church.

We know that Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 16: 18** that **He will build His church** and as **Colossians 1: 18** says **He is the head of it** because as **Ephesians 1: 22** says **the church is His body, the fullness of Him.**

You can see in **Revelation 1: 20 – 3: 22** that Jesus is in the midst of His churches and He identifies with the specific churches and He says to everyone one of them **I know your works.** He sees everything that goes on in the church, in our church as He did in the church at Thessalonica and He wants us to be a biblical, example church as well. And I can't think of a better church to look at as a biblical, example church to follow than the one to whom Paul is writing here, the church of the Thessalonians.

Let me give you a little background on this church at Thessalonica and how it got started. The Apostle Paul was the founder of the church while on his second missionary journey with Silas and Timothy. Turn to **Acts 17: 1.** *Give a brief history of Acts 16 and Paul and Silas put in the Philippian prison after being beat.*

Paul and Silas imprisoned after being beaten. Put in stocks to suffer. God releases them by an earthquake and they share the gospel with the jailer and his family and they are all converted and baptized. They stayed with Lydia, the first convert in Philippi, and then left for Thessalonica.

It was about a 100 mile journey from Philippi to Thessalonica and they had to stop two different nights, once in Amphipolis and once in Appollonia. You can imagine how difficult this journey would have been for them, but they arrive in Thessalonica. *Then look at Acts 17: 1 – 10*

So this church started out by Paul preaching in a Jewish synagogue that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and about His sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. These Jews heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and **SOME were persuaded** and believed and were converted. Verse 5 says some were not.

Not only did some Jews become born again believers but some Gentile converts to Judaism, Jewish proselytes, **devout Greeks**, were converted **and many leading women**. And by the way, 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1: 9 says **how you turned to God from idols to serve the living God**. They were Jews and Gentiles pagan idol worshippers that were converted and began the church at Thessalonica.

And the reason Paul is writing 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians to the church in Thessalonica is because he got rushed out of there by night, **Acts 17: 10** said, and he was wondering how they were doing. Look at **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2: 17 – 18** and then **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3: 1 – 2, 5** then **6 – 7**

And he also wrote because he wanted to set some things straight about some negative things being said about him and Silas and Timothy and their ministry. He also wrote to encourage them how to live and he also wrote to correct their wrong understanding about the return of Jesus Christ and the rapture and he also wrote to encourage them how to conduct themselves and treat one another in the church.

He wrote this book about 50 AD and it has so much practical application for us today as we begin to look at the model church in Thessalonica and put our church up to that lens of Scripture to see how we are doing.

We are going to see in Chapter One several qualities of an example church that we can compare to our church and our own individual lives. We are going to see in Chapter Two that sometimes when we live an example life, we will suffer for it, individually and as a church. We will also see that we have a choice; please men or please God. We will also see how and what it means to imitate an example church and people.

We will see in Chapter Three what it really means to love one another and what it means to sacrifice and encourage and build one another up in the faith to maturity. We will see in Chapter Four God's standard and command for sexual purity and holiness and what our responsibility is to unbelievers. We will see what happens to a born again believer when they die and how that relates to the rapture. We will see in Chapter Five how we are to live and how we are to treat one another in the church... and much more throughout this incredible book. So let's start in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Chapter One and Verse One.

**Verse 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 starts out here, as he does in many of his writings, with a greeting and his greeting comes from himself, Silvanus or Silas and from Timothy. All 3 are mentioned because all 3 had a significant impact and involvement in the formation and leading of the Thessalonian church as we saw in Acts 17.

So Paul and Silas had suffered and were willing to suffer for righteousness sake to see this new church get started and grow. Timothy's part in all of this was that after Paul and Silas left and later arrived in Athens, they became concerned for the church and sent Timothy back to see how they were doing.

In **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3: 2** it says that Timothy went back, in part, to **establish you and encourage you concerning your faith** because of the persecution and trials they were already experiencing as a new church.

So all 3 of these men had a vital part in the life of this church and there were several things that set this church apart as an example church to emulate, that we want to look at and strive to be or affirm to be as we consider our own church.

What were the things that set this church apart to make it a biblical, God honoring, Christ centered and Christ controlled example church to follow? Well, there are several that stand out in our passage in Verses 2 – 10, and we are going to look at each one individually and compare it to our church and to our individual lives as well. First of all they were a praying church. Vs 2.

## **#1: They were a Praying Church; both leadership and congregation**

**Verse Two: we give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.**

Paul and Silas and Timothy were the leaders of that church and they were part of that church and they were constantly praying for the people and the ministries of that church.

Listen to how they prayed in **2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1: 11** **we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and you in Him..** Paul's prayers were constantly deep for the people he loved.

In their prayers, they also thanked God because of that churches **growing faith** and their **love for each other** **2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1: 3** says. But not only were the leaders of that church men of prayer but the whole church were praying people.

Paul asked them in **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 17** to pray without ceasing and to pray for them as leaders **Verse 25** says, and they did. Paul asked them in **2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 3: 1** to **pray for us.** What do you want us to pray for Paul? **Pray that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.** And they did and that prayer was certainly answered. The leadership recognized the importance of prayer for their people and the people recognized the importance of prayer for their leaders and the church.

If we are going to put our church and our individual lives up to the lens of Scripture when it comes to being a people of prayer for our people and for our leadership and for the ministries of this church, how are we doing?

Well, I can tell you with certainty that you are being prayed for by the leadership of this church and that we are praying for the ministries of this church. You are prayed for by us individually throughout the week, you are prayed for on Sunday mornings before you get here, you are prayed for during this service, you are prayed for after this service.

You are prayed for by the Elders on Friday and you are prayed for whenever the Elders and Deacons meet together. And usually included in those prayers are prayers for the different ministries that take place during the week.

Because we believe what **James 5: 16** says **the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much**. One writer said “prayer for the sick is not a substitute for medicine, prayer for daily bread is not a substitute for work, and prayer for the lost is no substitute for the gospel, BUT those things are no substitute for prayer either. Because Christians pray, some are well who would still be sick, some alive who would be dead, souls are saved that would be lost, doors of opportunity are open that would still be shut”.

What does **Philippians 4: 6** say? **Be anxious for nothing, but in EVERYTHING by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God**. We have a lot to pray about don't we? Praying for the salvation of some, praying for spiritual growth and maturity in others, praying for deliverance from sin, praying for all kinds of health issues. Not to mention our missionaries, our ministries, our building project and much, much more. Well, they were not only praying leadership and people but they were also: Look at Verse 3.

## #2: They were a Faithful, Loving and Hope filled Church

**Verse Three: remembering without ceasing you work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.**

Paul is recalling in his mind, constantly, the attributes of this church that bring about his giving of thanks to God and the prayers offered on their behalf. Paul here lists 3 characteristics that stand out in this church that made them a serving, working, patient church: it is their **Work**, their **Labor** and their **Patience**. But notice what he adds to these characteristics that make them God honoring example qualities. It is their Work of **Faith**, it is their Labor of **Love** and it is their Patience in **Hope**.

You see, we can't be a God honoring church and people that just does the work and labor and endures patiently without the godly character qualities that motivate the work and labor and patience and those qualities are **faith**, **hope** and **love**, right?

The example of the Ephesus church in **Revelation 2: 1 – 5** *Read*

Paul recognized that anything that a church or individual does that is not motivated by faith, hope and love are works that need to be repented of, because they will be burned up. Paul also recognized that all three of these needs to be working in concert with one another.

He says later in **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 8:** to **put on the breastplate of Faith and Love and as a helmet, the Hope of salvation**. And remember what he said in **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13: 13:** **now abide these 3, faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.**



Paul told the church of Colosse in **Colossians 1: 4**: since we heard of your **Faith in Christ Jesus and your Love for all the saints; because of the Hope which is laid up for you in heaven.**

Paul says your **work of faith**. It doesn't mean you are working to gain your faith, we can't do that as **Ephesians 2: 8 – 9** and **Romans 3: 20 – 21** and many other places makes very clear. It is the work that accomplishes something, that gives evidence that there is genuine saving faith.

Isn't that what James said in **James 2: 18, 26** show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works... for faith without works is ... dead. **Ephesians 2: 10** we are His workmanship created..

He also says **your labor of love**. Love must always be the motive for what we do, If we labor, work and serve just because we are supposed to or no one else will do it or to gain favor with God or whatever, and not from love, we, as **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13: 3** says, **it profits you nothing**. By the way, the word **work** focuses on what is 'done', while the word **labor** focuses on how it is done. And the word has the idea of to the point of exhaustion in turmoil, and it is still done with the motive of love.

He also says **your patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ...** They were a church that had a persevering hope in the return of Jesus Christ, as we'll see in Verse 10, no matter what was going on in their lives and the life of the church. That is what **Titus 2: 13** says **looking for the blessed HOPE and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**

As a matter of fact, the writer of Hebrews in **Hebrews 6: 18 – 19** say we are to lay hold of the hope, in Christ Jesus, that is an anchor for the soul, both steadfast and sure...

So what Paul is saying that the Thessalonian church has, and what every God honor example church and people should have is: not works, but Works produced by Faith. Not labor, but Labor motivated by Love and not patience, but Patience prompted by Hope. And when you have all three of those working together, you have a church that honors God in its serving and ministering and is not just going through the motions.

So as we look at our church so far; are we a works produced by a faith grounded in the word of God people and church? What is the evidence of our faith? It's works, right. James says 'show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith (what) by my works, because faith without works is dead. The fruitful work of your life is evidence of an abiding faith.

Are we a labor motivated by a love for God and for people kind of church and people? The Thessalonian church was a loving church so it was easy for them to serve and labor for the Lord because they were serving out of love, not out of duty or because they had to.

Paul told them in **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4: 9 – 10** but concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, and indeed you do so toward all the brethren. They had such strong love for one another that made laboring for and serving one another a joy.

Are we a patient in tribulation and distresses knowing that someday Jesus Christ, who is our hope, is coming back for us kind of people and church? This church was also an enduring, patient church because they not only had a deep abiding love for one another and for the Lord but they had a deep abiding hope from heaven about their future.

This church could get through the worst of times in their own personal lives and they could get through the worst of times of persecution and trials and tests as a church because their hope took them beyond their circumstances to what awaits them in heaven.

There hope, Verse 3 says, is in Jesus Christ and His return, as we will see in Verse 10, and their being with Him in heaven forever. **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2: 19** says **what is our HOPE, or crown or rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?**

Are we this kind of church that has works of service produced by a deep abiding Faith? Are we a church that Labors, even to the point of exhaustion sometimes, for His kingdom motivated by a Love for God and for the saints and for the lost? And, are we a Patient church that endures individual trials in our personal lives as well as trials in our church because we are prompted by Hope in the return of Jesus Christ that transcends our circumstances and trials and difficulties?

Well, we have been a church long enough now to look at those areas and other areas we will see in chapter one to be able to answer those questions when we get to the end. Closing prayer

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1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3: 15, Acts 20: 28  
Ephesians 5: 24 – 29, 3: 10, Matthew 16: 18  
Colossians 1: 18, Ephesians 1: 22  
Revelation 1: 20 – 3: 22, Acts 17: 1 – 10  
1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2: 17 – 18, 3: 1 – 2, 5 – 7

Verse 1:

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3: 2

Verse 2:

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1: 3, 11, 3: 1  
1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 17, James 5: 16  
Philippians 4: 6

Verse 3:

Revelation 2: 1 – 5, 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 8  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13: 3, 13, Colossians 1: 4  
Ephesians 2: 8 – 10, Romans 3: 20 – 21  
James 2: 18, 26, Titus 2: 13, Hebrews 6: 18-19  
1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4: 9 – 10, 2: 19

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1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4: 9 – 10, 2: 19