

## Justified Boasting

Call to Worship: Psalm 133

1st Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

Hymn #285- *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*

Hymn Insert- *Family of God*

Hymn Insert- *By Faith*

### Introduction:

In 1st Thessalonians (chapter 1), Paul had expressed how he (and his companions) had continually given thanks to God for the love which the Thessalonians had for one another, especially in the context of ongoing persecution. It's much easier to love and serve others when you're comfortable and without trials, but the real test comes (the "rubber meets the road," as it were), when you're uncomfortable and suffering persecution, and that, for long periods of time, with no end in view. And so, Paul commended them for this.

And we recall, in the latter portion of the letter (chapter 4:9-10), Paul exhorted them to keep increasing in this regard; to continue to love one another more and more, in keeping with the pattern they were already practicing.

Well, here now, in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, we are encouraged to find that, in spite of the continuation of their persecution, they were indeed, abounding in this way. And so, this morning, we will seek to chew off one portion of Paul's expressed thanksgiving on behalf of the Thessalonians, which brings this reality to the forefront for us. May God be pleased to lead us to apply then, what we find here, as it is very relevant for the church of all ages.

### I. Paul's Boast

Paul begins verse 3 with these words, "*We are bound* to thank God always for you, brethren, *as it is fitting*, because..."

And so, before we get to the reasons, we simply note the intensity of Paul's language here. Notice, he doesn't simply say, "We thank God always for you," which would be encouraging in itself, but rather, Paul says, in essence, "*We have to* (we must) thank God always for you..." "It is right and proper for us to constantly thank God for you; it is fitting to do so, for the following reasons..." And so, without even looking ahead for the moment, clearly we can

expect Paul to provide some form of tangible motivation that would compel him (and his companions) to repeatedly thank God for something that God is doing among the Thessalonians. And of course, those reasons do follow, and they prove to be worthy of Paul's intense language here. What is going on in Thessalonica, and the context within which it is taking place, clearly manifests an act of God's power and grace among them. And such a glorious manifestation of God's work and power ought to draw awe and thanksgiving out of the hearts of His people.

What then are the specific reasons, for which, Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians?

1) Because their "faith grows exceedingly" (3a). Not simply that their faith *has grown* exceedingly, but that their faith, present tense, grows (or is growing) exceedingly. In other words, the process is ongoing, and there is a continual increase in their faith, which is still in an upward motion.

What Paul commended in the Thessalonians and thanked God for, in 1 Thessalonians 1:2, when he spoke of "remembering without ceasing (their) work of faith...", he here acknowledges as that which has increased and improved further, and that, to great lengths. Their trust in and commitment to God continues to be exhibited in greater and greater ways. One might certainly have expected the candle to grow dim, at some point, especially in the face of ongoing persecution and trials. One might expect a subsiding into a state of weariness; maybe parking their zeal and commitment down on the park bench for awhile. But, it has only flamed onward and to great lengths. [III: The more the Egyptians persecuted the Israelites, attempting to stunt their growth, the more they increased in number]

And when Paul speaks of their faith here, as in the case of 1 Thessalonians, where he refers to their "work of faith," it is important to understand that Paul is judging that improved faith by the quality of actions that flow out of it. In other words, he is not simply going by what they are professing about their faith, but by how they are living out of it. Paul is not God. He cannot see the heart. And so, he can only speak of what he witnesses outwardly, as an expression of their faith, indicating that their actions and risk taking were growing more and more, affirming the growth of their faith by those very fruits. The Thessalonian church was a vibrant and

thriving church, fighting the good fight, denying themselves, taking up their crosses and following Christ.

And of course, the greatest evidence of their growing faith is directly connected to the second reason that Paul gives God thanks for the Thessalonians.

2) Because "the love of everyone of you all abounds toward each other..." (3b). The greatest manifestation of their *exceedingly* growing faith was found in the very tangible ways, in which, they expressed their love for one another. In the midst of their own suffering, they maintained an outward focus, fixing their attention on the needs of one another, as an expression of their love, first and foremost, to Christ. This was consistent throughout the body. It was not just a core group. "The love of *every one of you all* abounds toward each other." They had each other's backs. When one was down, a hand came from all directions to pull him up. When jobs or material needs or homes or loved ones were lost in the persecution, many hands reached out to help. Homes were opened, goods were shared, prayers were offered up...etc. A circle of love was always there to lift up the hurting and weary.

Notice, the love of every one *abounded* toward each other. It was not a small ration of love or a love with limitations. It didn't go so far and then wane. No, it was a persistent love that flowed out by the barrel full, and kept coming...it abounded. It was sufficient and then some! Like the love of Christ does to us, their cups were mutually running over the top! Such was the profound way, in which, the Thessalonians were serving one another.

And again, what made this all so noteworthy; what highlighted the magnitude of virtue that was being expressed there, was the dark backdrop, upon which, it was all happening. [III: White looks far more whiter, when it stands in front of a black backdrop, doesn't it?]

Notice, Paul continues on in verse 4, "We are bound to thank God for you; it is only fitting because of your exceedingly growing faith, and the abundant love, which you have for one another, *so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure...*"

What was going on in Thessalonica was so profound; it was so revealing of the glorious power of God, that Paul boasted of the Thessalonians to all of the churches of God. They were the poster church; the example for other churches, most particularly for their perseverance in

faithfulness and love, and that, in the context of unrelenting persecutions and tribulations. Remember, this church has known no real, earthly peace, since it was born. The attacks were persistent and the enemy was not letting up. And yet, they endured. Their faith was being proven, and as it was proven, it grew stronger and stronger.

Notice, Paul highlights their patience as well, as that which he boasted of to the other churches. There's patience, and then there is "patience!" Sometimes, we like to speak of being patient with someone, who has perhaps rubbed us the wrong way. But in reality, no real harm has ever been done. But, when you are persecuted continually; when loved ones are being martyred; when you're forced to flee your home; when your livelihood is threatened; when you are in a constant state of discomfort, true patience is proven. What do you do when you pray and you pray and you pray, and the whirlwind still continues. Do you yet, wait upon God? Do you determine to stay put to the end, whatever is to come of your life in this world? The Thessalonians were exhibiting a profound level of patience, which exhibited a profound work of God in and by them. And that is why Paul was bound to give thanks to God repeatedly for them. And that is why Paul boasted their example to the other churches, so that they might look at Thessalonica and find a model to follow, as they endured their own sufferings. [III. What Job, and more so, Christ, does for us in these regards]

And so, Paul (and his companions) gave continual thanks to God for the Thessalonians, because of their growing faith and abounding love, in the context of ongoing persecution and tribulation. They were enduring, and in doing so, they left a pattern for others (and us) to behold, so that we might "press on" without fail, no matter what we must endure on the path ahead. [III. Rocky].

## **II. Conclusive 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) Clearly, the church at Thessalonica was known for its faith, love and perseverance among the churches. They were a model church for others in these regards, and Paul did not

hesitate to point to them as a reference for other churches, to consider, as a means of encouraging them forward in the battle.

I wonder, what would the Apostle Paul say of GRBC, if we could somehow transfer this body back to the first century? What church would we look like? What church would best represent us in the seven letters written to the churches of Asia in Revelation? What commendations would we receive? What warnings and rebukes?

Let me carry this one step further, from the corporate level to the individual level. If this entire body of believers were modeled after you, as the individual; if your commitment, your involvement, your faithfulness, your devotion to Christ, your devotional and prayer life, your exhibited love, your scale of faith, your sincerity of worship and singing of hymns...if you were the model example, by which, the rest of this body followed in step, what would this church look like? What would be the best label for such a church that was modeled after your commitment? Would it be the backsliding church? Would it be the faint or weary church? Would it be the worldly church? Would it be the "I love sports, politics, video games or TV" church? Would it be the hypocritical church? Would it be the dead church? Would it be the self-serving church? Would it be the absentee church? Would it be the aloof church? Or would it be the struggling but pressing forward church? Would it be the consistent (imperfect, but consistent) "fight the good fight of faith" church? Would it be the grateful and thankful to God for Christ church? Would it be the church of self-sacrifice? Let us all examine ourselves in this regard, with Judgment Day honesty, and let us, by the grace and mercy of God, make changes where necessary, as we locate those areas of decay that need repair.

2) While there is such a gross misunderstanding of "love" in our generation (in the church), and while the type of love that is promoted in our day, involves spurning the holiness of God and leaving people in their sins (discipline-less love), let us not run to the other extreme and miss the prominent importance that God places on true love in the church. You see, brethren, we can throw out the baby with the bath water, when we find such gross abuses being presented in the church at large. We don't want to let the world (and "Christianity Light") so wrest the concept of love from Scripture that the whole notion of love becomes virtually distasteful and repulsive to us. Love is indeed essential and paramount in the eyes of God. What the world has,

is not true love, and that is the problem. In fact, the world's form of "all acceptance" love is really hatred in the eyes of God.

What we need to do, brethren, is not to fear the loose love, which is found in the world, but rather, to present to the world the true love of God, which is found in Jesus Christ. We need to model the sacrificial love of Christ, which both, calls sinners to repentance, and sacrificially lays down our own lives for others, as an expression of the open arms, which Christ extends toward any and all sinners who repent. And we need to exhibit a costly love in this church, which is willing to be inconvenienced, to suffer long, indeed, to lay down our very lives for the good of the church. We need not mere theology, but processed theology, which makes its way from the brain and into the heart, jolting forth in the active ways in which we serve one another at our own expense.

Again, it's easy to love everyone when you feel good and when it costs nothing by way of sacrifice (Ill: The "I love everyone" drunk/high type of love). But when it involves sacrifice and inconvenience and loss on your part, that is where love takes on its flesh and bones and life. Such was the case with the Thessalonians (Ill: The Good Samaritan - loss of time, oil, money, further expense for the inn).

3) Brethren, we close by remembering that Paul thanked God for what he saw taking place at Thessalonica, because he knew that this was no mere work of mortal men. It were as much, as if, Paul were saying, "I thank God for giving you wings to fly, or to run one hundred miles an hour." Clearly, the Thessalonians were given a supernatural understanding of the love of Christ; His sacrifice and love were made so clear to them, that they could only do what they did, in persevering and faithfully serving God and one another.

The love of Christ can do amazing things, brethren. But sadly, our vision is often clouded, or we become short-sighted by the winds and the waves of the ocean of life that surrounds us. This is why we need to be a people of prayer. We just cannot possibly maintain a committed and faithful walk, apart from new and fresh revelations of the love of Christ toward us, by the Holy Spirit. And so, let me challenge you, brethren, to pray toward this end...together and individually. Pray Ephesians 3:14-21 for you and for our church (Read now).

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25