



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

What Constitutes Greatness and Success (1 Thess 1:1-10)?

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BIBLE STUDY

Location:
123 CAP

Times:
TUESDAYS

7:15AM *and* NOON

First Thessalonians 1:1-10
“What Constitutes Greatness and Success?”

Introduction

For the next two weeks, we will be studying the topic of exemplary behavior, and how this is related to greatness and success. Since the content of 1 and 2 Thessalonians is similar, we will take the approach of teaching the first chapter of both books since this will help us to understand the major ideas better.

It is important to note that the commendation of the church in 1 and 2 Thessalonians does not include things that we in the modern world, especially the United States, would necessarily consider as important. For example, Scripture does not refer to things, such as a good leader and good organization, good discipleship, or a good evangelistic outreach, which are generally considered evidences of a model church. It is true that these things are important, for example, evangelism was occurring in Thessalonica, and the Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Tim; Tit) give great emphasis to pastoral qualifications and church organization. However, the necessary virtues that are given in Scripture indicate what truly constitutes greatness and success. Without these qualities, a good leader, good organization, good discipleship, and a good evangelistic outreach are meaningless. *The same, of course, can be applied to the Capitol community with regard to leadership and organization.* Paul summarized the three virtues, which are necessary for exemplary behavior, in 1 Corinthians 13:13 (“But now abide faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love”). Scripture repeatedly emphasizes three virtues as essential to the Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, they are amalgamated in one verse as the things that “abide”: faith, hope, and love.

PAUL SUMMARIZED THE THREE VIRTUES, WHICH ARE NECESSARY FOR EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOR, IN FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:13 (“BUT NOW ABIDE FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, THESE THREE: BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE”): FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE.

Occasionally, if appropriate, Scripture will mention one or more of these virtues as evident among a body of believers. For example, in Romans 1:8, the saints in Rome were praised for their faith which was “being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” Philippians 1:9 records prayer for the love of all the saints in Philippi to abound (which, of course, assumes a love worth multiplying). The Colossians (1:4-5) were commended for their faith in Christ Jesus, the love they had for all the saints, and the hope they had of heaven. In other New Testament letters (written by Paul), there may not be any reference to the presence of these virtues, which does not necessarily imply that the virtues were absent in the other churches. For instance, the fact that there is no reference to the love and hope of the church in Rome, or the faith and hope of the church in Philippi, may not indicate that these virtues did not exist there.

However the mention of all three virtues in the opening text (vv. 1-4) of this First Epistle to the Thessalonians strongly implies that these virtues need to be manifest for a body of believers to gather and serve to the glory of God. Whenever God’s people assemble (whether in a church building or statehouse), it is to be in a spirit of faith, hope, and love. Christians are expected to work both corporately and individually in a spirit of faith, hope, and love.

FAITH THAT WORKS (1:3)

Every believer is justified by faith alone, but it is a faith that produces works (Rom 6—8) as John the Baptist proclaimed (“bring forth fruit as evidence of repentance”), and as taught by Jesus, and as James did in the second chapter of his epistle. Faith is the initiator of works.

James 2:14 (“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?”) gives additional help for differentiating between labor and work. The Greek word for “works” is *erga* (ἔργα). The same Greek word is translated either “works” or “deeds.” In James 2:14, it is translated “works” because the context of helping meet the needs of a fellow believer is given as an example of faith by James. The point is that “works” of faith demonstrate obedience to God’s commands, purposes, and will for His people, and would include obedient works, such as “making disciples” of all the nations (Matt 28:19) or living a pure, godly life (as described in 1 Thess 4:1-12).

LOVE THAT LABORS (1:3)

The phrase “labor of love” (or “labor prompted by love”) is similar to the Greek construction for “work of faith.” Whereas faith is related more to obedience to God, love is related more to uncompromising, sacrificial labor for fellow believers. An example of a laboring love is the kind of sacrifice involved in caring for someone who is ill or incapacitated, or simply meeting the needs of another.

HOPE THAT ENDURES (1:3)

The phrase, “steadfastness of hope” (or “endurance inspired by hope”) is literally translated “endurance by (from) hope.” The steadfastness is sustained by (from) hope. The steadfastness is based upon the reality that one firmly believes (knows) the future is ultimately assured. It means one continues pressing “on in order that” he/she “may lay hold of that for which also” he/she is “laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” Steadfastness is “to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). One keeps persevering when he/she can see the goal at the end of the race. For this reason, Paul exhorted, “Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Cor 9:24). The desolate present can be endured if one is certain of the future.

The genitives “of faith,” “of love,” and “of hope” are characterized by the generating principles of “work,” “love,” and “steadfastness,” which set their mark upon each of the genitives. Therefore, work is produced by faith and is characteristic of faith. Labor is prompted by love and is characteristic of love. Steadfastness is marked by hope and is characteristic of hope. Here in verses 3-4, we have the great triad of Christian graces that are evident for exemplary behavior.

With his/her conscience captive to God’s Word, a successful Christian must possess three virtues: faith, love, and hope. We rarely measure success in terms of these virtues. Perhaps one reason is that the virtues are difficult to measure. Another reason may be that these virtues are the sovereign work of God, and no believer can receive recognition for their existence. The three virtues are the environment by (from) which authentic quantitative and qualitative growth and service emerge.

CHANGE THAT HAS SPECIFIC RESULTS (1:4-7)

In verses 4-5, we find attention to the fact that the transformation of the believer’s life is confirmation of God’s choice of him/her. “Knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you” (v. 4). The doctrine of divine choosing is taught here (or doctrine of election, as we use the archaic English meaning of the Greek word, *eklogen* [“calling from”] from *eklegomai*, as in the King James Version of the Bible).

The essential dynamics in spiritual transformation are “in power and in the Holy Spirit.” When God the Holy Spirit does His work, He applies the gospel message with power. The Spirit’s “power” works within the evangelist in addition to the one who is being evangelized. Based upon what we can learn about evangelism in the Book of Acts and the nature of human total depravity, the evangelist receives power from the Holy Spirit to speak clearly and boldly, and the one being evangelized receives power to overcome his resistance to the gospel and to understand the truth of the message. God’s biblical means for impacting humanity is the proclamation of the propositional truths of Scripture and offering fervent prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit, which is persuaded by the fact that we are completely unable and completely dependant upon God. Moreover, the power applied by the Holy Spirit creates a transformation that has specific results as revealed in verses 6-7 (and also 2 Thess 1 which we will study next week).

LIVES THAT REVERBERATE (1:8-10)

“For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you” (v. 8). The language of verse 8 suggests the sound of a trumpet or of thunder, as if to reverberate like our echo. The Greek word for “sounded forth” is *exéchētai* (ἐξήχηται), which is a perfect passive and therefore implies a sound that is continuing to sound forth from Thessalonica like music from an amplifier. The idea seems to be that a lively faith reverberates with energy or activity from one person to another. Such activity is not the model for obeying the Great Commission, but it is one way that God will see that it is fulfilled.

Paul further stated, “but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.” What was the reason for this marvelous testimony? Paul explained in verses 9 and 10. Paul stated, “you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.” Idols today may differ in form, but they still epitomize all that people believe constitutes a good life in the absence of God. In modern terms, this would indicate a completely different purpose of life from those who set the world as their example, and as a result of this difference, we would have the glorifying of the Lord as our purpose in this world.

Lastly, verse 10 indicates that the exemplary believer is waiting for God’s Son, Jesus Christ, from heaven. There is no indication that a believer is to be idle and simply looking into the sky. To wait (Gk. *anameno*) is a present infinitive in Greek and means “to be continuously waiting.” It is the idea literally “to wait,” with the fuller meaning “to remain alert” or “expect.” To “wait” conveys the idea of expectation.

The exemplary believer is busy serving God, which also means “to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you” (1 Thess 4:11). Attending to one’s own business, and working with one’s abilities, is with a mindset that is hopeful concerning the future.

Another meaning of “wait” is to realize that all you do will be rewarded or rejected by the Lord Jesus Christ when He returns for His people. Such realization provides the highest purpose for all that you do. Nothing is wasted or useless in terms of eternity. Everything you do in life counts for something regardless of how tedious a task may seem.

Thank you for allowing me the honor to provide ongoing Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to talk with me, or contact me by email or phone. I am praying for you personally throughout the day and week (1 Tim 2:1-4).

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