



STANDING FAST IN THE LORD

Thankfulness for God's Grace in a Faithful Church

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Praise God for a faithful church – a faith family – that's steadfast in faith, love, and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (2-10).

- *Thank God for steadfastness in hope and in the work and labor of the gospel (3).*
- *Thank God for those he's called to be his church (4).*
 - *A faithful church is built on the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit (5a).*
 - *A faithful church is composed of disciples who are disciplined to imitate Jesus with joy even in affliction (6).*
 - *A faithful church has a witness that God uses to advance the gospel (7-8).*
 - *A faithful church serves the living and true God, waiting on his Son's return (9-10).*

As part of Paul's greeting to the church in Thessalonica, he praises God for the church, which is a part of his extended faith family (his "brothers" in Christ), because of its steadfastness in faith, love, and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's praise wasn't generic, though. It was grounded in some very specific things about the church in Thessalonica, which are worth remembering and continuing to thank the Lord for in his church today.

First, Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians steadfastness in hope and in the work and labor of the gospel. This church was not a church to just sit on the pew. It wasn't a church that was only inwardly focused. It wasn't a church that was filled with consumers who were only there for what they could get. It was a church where faith worked and where love was displayed in labor! It was a church that worked and labored in the gospel while standing steadfast in the hope it had in Jesus Christ. What a beautiful picture of God's design for his church still today, and what an important reminder for those of us in the church: Thank God for steadfastness in hope and in the work and labor of the gospel!

Second, Paul thanked God for those he had called to be his church. Paul knew that God's salvation was an act of God's grace. It wasn't initiated by man or earned by works. God's church – just like Israel – existed because of God's gracious call. In the language of the New Testament, the word for "chosen" is a form of the root word from which we get the English word "to elect." It's God's picking or choosing that established Israel and that established and builds his church. Man's response is real and is critical, but that response is only possible because of God's gracious call.

Finally, Paul provided some specifics related to the church in Thessalonica, which was a faithful church at this point in history. The Lord's Word through the apostle Paul points to some important characteristics of faithful churches still today. Here's the quick list of characteristics: (1) A faithful church is built on the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. (2) A faithful church is composed of disciples who are disciplined to imitate Jesus with joy even in affliction. (3) A faithful church has a witness that God uses to advance the gospel. (4) A faithful church serves the living and true God, waiting on his Son's return. Paul praised the Lord for these specific things in the church in Thessalonica, and today, we should do the same, praying for these things to mark our church and praising God for these things as we see his grace at work through our church!

1. From verse 2, think about your church. Spend time filling in the blank in this statement: *When I think of _____ in my church, I always want to thank and praise the Lord.* Take time to share the people/things you are thankful for in your church. Praise God for them!



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2. Read verse 3, still considering your discussion over verse 2. How do you see the work of faith, labor of love, and the steadfastness in hope in your church? What about in your life?
3. Read verse 4, how are God's love and his call (choosing or election) connected? How is God's call a display of his love? If you are in Christ, do you see yourself as loved and chosen by God? If not, why not? Why does God emphasize this so much in Scripture (find and discuss other passages that emphasize God's calling, choosing, or election).
4. Take time to read the rest of the passage and to discuss each characteristic of a faithful church that is laid out in Paul's introductory greeting to the church in Thessalonica.
 - a. What are some gimmicks that draw crowds or manipulate emotional responses that sometimes try to replace the power and work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel?
 - b. What are the ways that disciples are being made in your church? Are you being disciplined? If so, how, and by who? Are you disciplining anyone? If so, how, and who?
 - c. What is the witness of your church? Is it like the church in Thessalonica? Is your church – you as a part of the church – living steadfast in hope and in work and labor in the gospel such that God is advancing his Word through you?
 - d. How are you serving the living and true God as his church? Share and encourage one another in serving the Lord! Are you waiting and longing for the return of Jesus? If not, why not? Are you ready for the return of Jesus? If not, turn to him today!