

Four Distinctives of a Healthy Church

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 and 3:1-3

Introduction

Typically, we go verse by verse in expositional teaching here at San Tan Bible Church. We have gone through the following books:

1 John, Titus, Colossians, Mark, James, Several Psalms, Genesis 1-25, Philippians, 1 John

It has been my personal goal to preach out of every book of Bible.

- We have a few more to go to complete the Old Testament, but we will work on it.
- Today we finish the New Testament: We will study 2 Thessalonians

Summary of this letter

There are 2 primary teaching points:

- 1) Eschatological follow-up from 2 Thessalonians
They were basically asking “Did we miss the Day of the Lord?”
- 2) Church discipline regarding idleness

But there is a third aspect to this letter and we are going to look at it today:

- 3) Personal communication with church

Read 2 Thessalonians 1: 1-5 and 3:1-3

Point: 4 Distinctives of a Healthy Church:

1. Has a growing and persevering faith
2. Loving one another
3. God’s Word is active and it is honored
4. God’s Word is obeyed

But first, let us look at some background about the church in Thessalonica.

Acts 17:1-13 - gives us information on how this church was started

Timing: 2nd Missionary journey about 50AD

1. These folks were rather 'ordinary'

They were not noble minded and naturally studious as the Bereans (17:11).

They were as committed to the Word as the Bereans but didn't have that same reputation.

Who do you identify with?

2. They were persecuted

The jealousy of Jews led the Jews to turn to the heathens of the marketplace to form a mob against what Paul was teaching.

The government punished them. They created a bond which required a significant financial investment for Paul's teachings. This bond meant Paul could not visit in person. See 1 Thess. 2:18

Paul faced adversity in most, but not all places:

- Athens (17:16-34), "open-minded" Church of Athens?

3. They were a diverse group of believers

Jews, Gentiles, Women (17:4) wouldn't typically socialize together but they formed this church together.

4. Paul was not present very long after it started. Paul was forced to leave so the "B" team ministry was in Thessalonica. Paul writes this letter from Corinth in 51 AD (1 Thess) and 52 AD (2 Thess).

Back to the 4 Distinctives of a Healthy Church:

1. They Have a Growing and Persevering Faith (1:3,4)

Faith is God-given response to God changing the heart

Not everyone given this gift. Not all had faith.(3:2)

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us where our faith comes from - it is a gift from God. The church is made up of those who have faith.

Paul emphasizes the Thessalonians growing faith

The faith he is talking about here is the faith that grows as more areas of life come under God's control and become dependent on Him. This is not a one-time walk down an aisle when you make a right moment with the man upstairs.

It is faith/trust/dependence first for salvation. As a Christian, you grow in faith in everything else; in all aspects of your life - your family, your work, your school, your relationships

Paul emphasizes the Thessalonians persevering nature of faith

Their faith is ongoing in the context of suffering and persecution.

This is connected in some ways to the topic of hope that they had in eternity that Paul wrote about in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. They know that their eternal security can not be lost.

Faith is primarily internal, while the other 3 distinctive of a healthy church are primarily external.

It is not a matter of works. You can't "get" faith. It is given as a gift.

This first distinctive is foundational to the other three, otherwise it is not a Christian Church

Illustration: Many years ago in a different city, I was meeting with leadership of a church that was struggling. I suggested that, on a whiteboard, they make two columns and write on one side "Church" and on the other side "Social Club". Then, go to the Bible and decide which one of these you want to be. If you are a church, certain things will flow out of Christians meeting together, such as faith in Jesus Christ. If you are a

social club, your shared values or culture or activities will bind you together.

2. Loving one another (1:3)

Recall the diversity of Thessalonican church - so they are not loving similar people - there are Jews, Gentiles and women.

I have to say that San Tan Bible Church is the most diverse church I have ever experienced.

Illustration: All of the testimonies at Men's Breakfast are so often so very different - different backgrounds, experiences etc.

Only thing we need is someone donate 10 acres in the area and build a building! :)

This love of one another was so important to this church because it was so important to Paul, their preacher. Love was an answer to Paul's prayer in 1 Thess. 3:12.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - the description of love — read it slowly

3. God's Word is Active and it is Honored (3:1)

a. Actively taught

Greek word for "spread rapidly": "might run" — proclaimed

The Word of God is active; it is not passive.

There is a modern church heresy that says the way of the church is to form spiritual relationships with unbelievers, and then teach them the Word of God.

The church is to be active with the Word of God - active is studying it, teaching it and obeying it.

This emphasis on teaching is not a New Testament phenomenon -
Jehosophaat: 2 Chronicles 17:7-9

Ezra: the emphasis was to teach the meaning of God's Word
(Nehemiah 8-7-8)

Note: Paul and Apostles words were God's Word

1 Thess 2.13 - Paul explains the basis of his teaching

2 Peter 3:16 -

Application: Our church is committed to this as well. There are many opportunities at STBC to actively learn and be taught the Word of God - Bible Hour, Ministries, Home Groups

b. Honored

The Bible given splendor. How do we treat God's Word? Is it just the 'extra' or is it the highlight of what we focus on.

Illustration: Old book collection - I have these special books in a special place; it is honored as special.

Example: We stand for the public reading of Scripture here at STBC because we honor God's Word.

Remember the context - these are not just the noble-minded people who studied all the time, but they honored it because it was the Word of God.

4. God's Word is Obeyed (3:4)

This church was under persecution....yet obedience to God's Word.
They have the "B" team ministry....yet obedience to God's Word.

Compare to the Corinthian church where Paul was present for 1.5 years. They had the 3 Greatest teachers of the time: Paul, Apollos, Peter. Yet, the church was plagued with divisions and disobedience.

Application: Do you have pride in your preacher?

There are many unhealthy examples.

Here is a positive example:

Years ago, Pastor Clay was meeting with another church leadership. At one point, he pointed the group to the Word and he wanted obedience.

Beyond loving others and honoring God's word, the obedience list is long. I am not going through the list of what you or I need to do in obedience because that is not my job. That is for the Holy Spirit.

What is Holy Spirit convicting you of to bring you under the authority of God?

Summary

These 3 external distinctives all flow from the one internal distinctive of being saved.

- 1) In our current study of 1 John we have read about the 3 tests of a true Christian:
Love, Doctrine, Obedience
- 2) When San Tan was in the planning phase, people would ask us what our distinctives, or our 'schtick' would be.

Here it is: Word, Worship (obedience), Love

Nine years later: How is SanTan Bible doing? You?