

Grace Life Fellowship Group

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1 Thessalonians 1:2–3

The Necessary Fruitfulness of the Christian Life

We return this morning to our study of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

So turn with me to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1.

Last week as we became acquainted with the historical setting of this books there were a few important features that we drew our attention to:

- First of all, we learned from Acts 17 that the church in Thessalonica was established by the Apostle Paul around the year 50 AD, less than 20 years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.
- Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy faced opposition in the city from the Jews of the synagogue, because their message was drawing away both Jewish and Gentile followers away from Jewish worship and religion.
- The opposition they faced was not only from the Jews in the city, but also from the Gentile citizens of the city.
 - As we learned last week, the city of Thessalonica had a rich history and enjoyed a politically and socially advantageous status as a free city within the Roman empire.
 - As a free city, they were permitted to govern themselves while at the same time receive protection and support from Rome.
 - The allegiance of the city to Rome was not merely political, but religious as well.
- So, the message of Paul that Jesus is the **Messiah** upset the Jews, and his message that Jesus is **King** threatened the social, political, and religious order of the Gentile citizens of Thessalonica.

- In fact, the charge brought against them by the mob was: “These men who have upset the world have come here also.”
 - Evidently their reputation preceded them, and they became known as those who upset the social stability of the world.
- The Jews did not want to lose followers in the city, and the Gentiles did not want to lose their status as a privileged city within the Roman empire.
- The Jews did not want to lose religious influence, and the Gentiles did not want to be lose their privileges by allowing their city’s religious and political allegiances shift away from Rome.
- So, the persecution in the city rose to the point that Paul and his companions had to flee the city sooner than expected.
- They spend anywhere between 3 to 6 months teaching and establishing the church of the Thessalonians, before they were forced out.
- Now this was a familiar experience for Paul.
- He had been driven out of cities before after establishing a church there, and as we see in his first missionary journey, he was able to return to strengthen the churches.
- On this second missionary journey, however, he had been repeatedly prevented from returning.
- After being chased out of Thessalonica, he was chased out of Barea also, before making his way to Athens and Corinth.
- His heart was a pastor’s heart, who hated the fact that he could not return to care for the souls that the Lord had saved.
- And given the sever persecution in Thessalonica that caused him to leave the city in the first place, he was especially concerned for leaving this infant church in a place like that.
- His concern was this: Will the faith of this church continue to stand in light of the attacks from unbelieving Jews and Gentiles in the city.
- In every way, the church was a target in the city:
 - Religiously, they forsook the gods of the Gentiles around them, claimed to be the true worshippers of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - Politically, they would have been accused of sedition for worshipping another King than Caesar.

- Socially, their primary commitment to one another within this new Christian community would have ostracized them from the rest of the culture.
 - These are Paul's deep concerns for the new church.
 - So, just months after having to leave the city, Paul sends back Timothy to check in on the Thessalonians.
 - Timothy returns with good news about the church, and even though Paul is still unable to return, he finds it necessary to give encouragement and instruction by way of this letter.
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Now, as we seek to situate ourselves in this letter, we recognize at least three major divisions.

Chapter 1 is a word of **thanksgiving** which outlines the conversion of the Thessalonians, which is meant to serve **as an encouragement** to the church.

In chapters 2 and 3, the focus is on the Apostle Paul himself, where he describes his own love and labor on behalf of the Thessalonians, no doubt because his character and his ministry was being attacked by opponents in Thessalonica.

Then, in chapters 4 and 5, both directly and indirectly, he both **exhorts** them to further Christian maturity and **instructs** them in important doctrinal matters.

This morning, we turn our attention to chapter 1.

Although we will focus our attention only to verses 2 and 3, let's read the entirety of chapter 1 together.

1 Thessalonians 1 (NASB95)

1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

As we said, this chapter is a pastoral encouragement to the Thessalonians, and it is not merely a listing out of the character and conversion of the church, but it is a **thanksgiving to God** for all of these things.

Notice verse 2 again,

1 Thessalonians 1:2 (NASB95)

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

This verse, which characterizes the rest of the chapter, puts everything that Paul says here in the context of thanksgiving to God.

These qualities are not simply what Paul personally values and appreciates for his own sake, but they are things which require a heart of gratitude toward God.

In other words, he is not merely reminding them of the virtues that he happened to appreciate about them, but he is saying,

“these things which I know and remember about you are worthy to bring into the presence of God in prayer as an offering of thanksgiving.”

So, this chapter is an encouragement to the church because right here at the beginning when he says, “I thank for always for all of you,” what does that imply?

It implies that God is at work in you.

God is the one who ought to be thanked because God is the ultimate source and power of all that I see in your life.

So, by telling them that he thanks God for them, he is affirming the reality that God is at work in their souls.

To say, “I thank God for you” is equivalent to saying, “I know that God is at work in you.”

Then in the last half of verse 2, he says “making mention of you in our prayers.”

So not only is he affirming God’s work in their souls, but here in the second half of the verse, the encouragement is that he has been praying for them.

“You are a constant topic in our prayer life, and as we are petitioning God on your behalf, we can’t help but also thanking God for you.”

And of course, he gets specific about what he is thankful for in them, but before we get to those specific virtues, I want us to see that this is a pattern for Paul.

In almost every letter that he wrote to other churches, he encourages them by describing the thanksgiving he gives to God during his prayers for them.

Romans 1:8 (NASB95)

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

I thank my God for you, and here is the reason why: your faith is not able to be contained, but it is becoming well-known in the world.

1 Corinthians 1:4–5 (NASB95)

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,

I thank God for the grace that He has worked in you, that you have been enriched in all speech and knowledge.

Philippians 1:3–5 (NASB95)

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

I have been joyfully praying for you, and I thank God for the way you have partnered with me in the advancement of the gospel since day one.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NASB95)

3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

It is fitting that I thank God for you, because I have seen how your faith has been growing abundantly, and your love for one another has been increasing.

2 Timothy 1:3,5 (NASB95)

3 I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,

5 For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.

As I am in constant prayer for you, I am reminded of the genuine faith that is within you, and I thank God for it.

Philemon 4-5 (NASB95)

4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,

5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

I thank God that I am hearing about the love that you have for Christ and for one another.

What a way to encourage one another in the body of Christ!

“Not only am I praying for you, but I am thanking God for His work in you. And I need you to know that I have been thanking God for the patience you have displayed throughout the trial you are going through.”

“As I have been praying for your needs this week, I have also been thanking God for your humble spirit in your response to the truth.”

Notice the same theme at the beginning and end of verse 3:

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (NASB95)

3 constantly bearing in mind ... **[skip to the end]** in the presence of our God and Father,

When we bring ourselves into the presence of God in prayer, these are the things that come to mind about you.

He had spent only a few months with them, but in that time, there were certain unforgettable qualities that God was producing in them.

These are the virtues that he says, we are bearing in mind. We cannot forget these qualities that define how you live.

They were evident when we were with you, and now as we look back, they are the unforgettable qualities of God's work within you.

These unmistakable virtues that Paul remembers are their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.

And notice that phrase in verse 3, "in our Lord Jesus Christ."

That phrase is not only attached to the word "hope," but to all three of the spiritual virtues that he mentions.

In other words, Paul remembers that this was a church that exalted the Lord...

- by their faith in Christ,
- by their love for Christ, and
- by their hope in Christ.

Their faith, love, and hope had as its object the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was not a generic faith, but one that was fixed on Christ.

We could put it this way: This was a Christ-centered, Christ-focused, and Christ-exalting church.

Whatever else we might say about a church that exalts Christ, these three virtues must be present.

Their faith in Christ was evident. Their love for Christ was unmistakable. And their hope in Christ was obvious.

Now, we want to carefully examine each of these three qualities individually...

But first, I want to consider them as a whole and draw out a biblical principle that Paul's language here points our attention to.

Now, as we read these three pairs – work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope – what Paul means is that the first word is *produced by* the second word.

- In other words, the phrase, “work of faith” means, “works that are produced by faith”.
- The phrase “labor of love” means, “labor that is produced by love”
- The phrase, “steadfastness of hope” means “steadfastness that is produced by hope.”

Again, the first word is produced by the second.

The NIV translates this verse well, because it makes us aware of the relationship between “work” and “faith,” between “labor” and “love,” and between “steadfastness” and “hope.”

Listen to 1 Thessalonians 1:3 in the NIV:

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV)

We remember before our God and Father your work **produced** by faith, your labor **prompted** by love, and your endurance **inspired** by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can see in that translation the relationship between the words in these phrases:

- Work is **produced** by faith,
- Labor that is **prompted** by love,
- And endurance that is **inspired** by hope.

Now I said I wanted to draw out a biblical principle here, and the principle is this:

Spiritual realities – like faith, love, and hope – make themselves evident only by what they produce in a person’s life.

Again: Spiritual realities make themselves evident by what they produce in a person’s life.

We cannot peer into our own soul, let alone someone else’s soul and see what resides there.

But we can see the fruit of someone’s life.

Jesus taught this principle:

Matthew 7:15–18 (NASB95)

15 “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

16 “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

17 “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Jesus' warning against false teachers is undergirded by the reality that the spiritual reality of someone's soul – whether good or bad – will bear itself out in the deeds of their life.

Paul taught this same principle in the book of Galatians, so turn with me to Galatians chapter 5.

What Paul does in Galatians 5 is he contrasts the flesh and the Spirit.

The flesh is a reference to that spiritual influence within us that is opposed to God and his ways.

The Spirit, on the other hand, is the Spirit of God, which of course teaches us to obey God.

Both the flesh and the Spirit are spiritual realities that are at work within us, and in Galatians 5, Paul outlines for us how we can know which spiritual influence is at work in our lives:

We will start in verse 16:

Galatians 5:16–21 (NASB95)

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So, if we ask the question, Paul: How do I know if I am walking according to the flesh? His answer here is: look at the deeds that are being produced in your life.

“The deeds of the flesh,” he says, “are evident.”

If I find myself participating in any of these deeds, I can be certain of which spiritual influence I am allowing to gain the upper hand in my heart.

Galatians 5:22–23 (NASB95)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Once again, the way to determine whether I am walking in the Spirit is in what is being produced in my life.

This is the principle we are driving at: Spiritual realities make themselves evident by what they produce in a person’s life.

Turning back to 1 Thessalonians 1, we are now better able to appreciate what Paul says here to the Thessalonians in verse 3.

He says, I thank God for you, because

- I know that your works are produced by an unswerving faith in Christ.
- I know that your labor is evidence of a genuine love for Christ.
- And I know that your steadfastness is the fruit of your hope in Christ.

So, what Paul gives to us as he is thanking the Lord for this thriving church are

Three Evidences of a Christ-Exalting Church

He was certain that this church was one that exalted Christ not merely because of their profession of faith, love, and hope, but because the fruit of their life gave evidence to the reality of these spiritual virtues.

Their faith was evidenced by their work, their love was evidenced in the labor, and their hope was evidenced by their steadfastness.

We have gotten a sense of the overall thrust of these virtues, but now let's take them one at a time.

The First Evidence of a Christ-Exalting Church is **Works Produced by Allegiance to Christ**.

Now, we have framed up "faith" as "allegiance" here because what is most telling about us as we examine our works is who or what we have given ourselves over to and aligned ourselves with.

A true faith in Christ is an allegiance to Christ in which works proving that allegiance will be evident.

In this context, we aren't given the details about what kind of works he has in mind, but no doubt they are the kind of works that proved their allegiance to Christ amidst a society that was badgering them from all sides.

When the preachers first came to Thessalonica, they were known as those who turned the whole world upside down, and no doubt the church at Thessalonica became known as those whose entire lives had turned upside down.

Their works were evident in demonstrating their faith and allegiance was in Christ.

Their faith was producing works.

Now, the mention of faith and works in the same phrase no doubt can cause us a measure of angst because we know that we are **not** saved by works, but by faith alone.

Romans 3:28 (NASB95)

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Faith is the means by which we are justified, and here Paul says faith plays no role at all in justification.

A person is not justified by performing works, but only by faith.

Galatians 2:16 (NASB95)

16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Once again, in the realm of justification, faith and works are put at odds to one another in this passage.

One more:

Philippians 3:9 (NASB95)

9 ... not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Paul says that when it comes to receiving righteousness from God, it is not obtained or derived from performing works of the Law, but through faith in Christ.

So, in almost every other passage from Paul where faith and works are mentioned, they are made to be enemies of one another.

By faith, not by works. On the basis of faith, not works.

We are justified by faith apart from works of the law.

But this passage in 1 Thessalonians equips us to have a fully biblical perspective on the relationship between faith and works.

Paul says here in 1 Thessalonians that faith produces works.

In fact, the only way Paul could have known the reality of their faith was in the works that it produced.

We can summarize the biblical data on faith and works this way:

In justification, faith is opposed to works.

In sanctification, faith is what produces works.

As a matter of fact, James tells us that anyone who claims to have faith, yet does not have the evidence of works in their life possesses a dead faith.

James 2:14 (NASB95)

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can **that** faith save him?

The implied answer is of course, No.

Good works are the necessary and inevitable result and fruit of a true and living faith.

James 2:18 (NASB95)

18 But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.**”

Notice that: **I will show you my faith by my works.**

In our passage Paul is saying that the Thessalonians have shown their faith by their works.

Now I know that these are truths that are familiar to many of us, but it is a reminder that there is one and only one reliable criteria for evaluating our faith:

What do the **works** of my life indicate about my faith?

The criteria of **works** are the only standard given to us by which we can measure our faith.

The deeds and fruit of one’s life are an objective and irrefutable evidence of faith or lack thereof.

But even though we know this, how often do we turn to subjective and superficial standards to evaluate our faith?

- Oh, I must not be walking by faith, because my bible reading this week has felt dry.
- Man, I know my faith is strong because I felt something come over me when I heard that Christian song on the radio.

What is wrong with both of these ways of thinking? Both of these are relying on our subjective sensations and experience to evaluate our faith rather than an honest assessment of the works that our faith is producing.

In their book “Free to Be Holy,” Jerry Wragg and Paul Shirley comment on this very tendency:

Not long ago a young man mentioned that he was shocked to hear that true faith isn't verified by whatever we're sensing at the time. He always assumed that faith—if it was real – had to be somehow “felt” or “emotionally experienced.” He went on to explain that he didn't think he could truly obey until certain emotional sensations accompanied his submission to Christ. It's a common but unnecessary confusion. ¹

That is exactly the tendency we are talking about here: to assume that true faith can be verified by whatever I can perceive in my senses.

Now at this point in the book, they quote and make comments on Hebrews 11:1. Listen to what they say about faith and our emotional sensations:

We have already seen from Hebrews 11:1 [that] "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things **not** seen." The writer defines faith without any reference to how we feel. It's rooted in spiritual “hope” and “conviction,” regardless of what we are experiencing.... [now listen to this] It's not that we're totally unmoved by our surroundings and emotions. But real faith is the “assurance of things hoped for” – not of things sensed.

Do you see the point?

Faith is defined in Hebrews as the conviction of things not seen. It is being assured and convinced of something that I am not able to verify by my sense perception. I can't see it, I can't feel it.

In fact, we might even say that true faith is most alive and evident when it entrusts itself to Christ regardless of how I feel.

¹ Free to Be Holy, 66.

So the point is this: we don't turn to our emotional state to give us confidence about our faith in Christ.

Instead, just as Paul encourages the Thessalonians here, faith is seen in the works that it produces.

Three Evidences of a Christ-Exalting Church

1. Works produced by Allegiance to Christ
2. Toil Motivated by Affection for Christ

Now the word "labor" here carries the idea of completing a task in which strenuous effort is involved.

It is not a generic term like "work" which can refer to deeds and activities in themselves.

This word "labor" emphasizes the burdensome nature of the work.

Turn with me to chapter 3, where Paul uses this same term another time in this letter.

1 Thessalonians 3:5 (NASB95)

5 For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our **labor** would be in vain.

Paul's concern in this verse is that all of the strenuous effort and burdensome toil on behalf of the Thessalonians would be in vain.

His concern is not merely that his **activities** would have been in vain, but that all of the diligence and strain and effort and toil would have been in vain.

That is the idea behind this word "labor" – the strenuous effort and strain that is put into a task.

Now once again, we are not given any indication as to what kinds of labors Paul has in mind, but it probably refers to the effort they exerted as they poured themselves out for one another.

And notice the source of this labor: He says that it is a labor produced by love.

Or as we have called it, Toil Motivated by Affection for Christ.

We understand what this is like, don't we?

When we are in the throes of a difficult task, and the only thing keeping us motivated is the love we have for the one we are serving.

In this case, it is the love and affection we have for Christ that becomes the fuel for our continued labors.

In the same way that faith is seen in the works that it produces, here he says that love is seen in the strenuous effort that it produces.

And just like our works give evidence of our faith, our willingness to labor and strive give evidence of our love for Christ.

Whether in the path of personal obedience for Christ or in the path of serving others, if we are not willing to put forth the strenuous effort that is required, it may be an indication that our love for Christ is waning.

When obedience to God's commands feels too difficult, too involved, too laborious, it is our love for Christ that is tested in that moment.

What did Christ say, "If you love me you will obey my commandments."

And just like we emphasized with faith, we are often tempted to evaluate our love by something other than the criteria given here.

We have a tendency to evaluate our love once again by our subjective feeling we have at certain moments...

But the standard given to us here is one that asks the question, “Am I motivated to expend myself to the point of exhaustion out my love for Christ?”

My personal desire for comfort and ease takes a back seat to the needs of other in the body of Christ.

And this fits well with our definition of love in other places of Scripture.

- We know that love does not insist on its own way;
- We know that love does what it does for the sake of someone else at great personal cost.
- We know that love is sacrificial.

We know that we are walking in love by our ability give up our own desires, submit ourselves to strenuous effort on behalf of others.

Ephesians 5:2 (NASB95)

2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and **gave Himself up for us**, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

The kind of love we are called to walk in is the same sacrificial love that Christ Himself displayed.

So this toil motivated by affection for Christ is a labor that is willing to undergo the strenuous effort and exhaustion that is required to serve others.

So in the same way that we are challenged to evaluate our faith in Christ by the works that our faith produces...

Here we are challenged to evaluate our love for Christ by our efforts in service to the body of Christ.

Now one thing I love about this body of believers is that I have had a front row seat to so many labors that are the evidence of love for Christ.

It is one of the things that I am most grateful for as a member of this church.

You cannot be a part of this fellowship for too long before you see toils and labors of the people on behalf of one another, even at great personal cost.

Yet at the same time, for some of us, we may need to ask ourselves this:

Could it be that my lack of commitment to the body of Christ and my unwillingness to pour myself out for others is an evidence of a lack of love for Christ?

If we are not willing to expend our time and energies on behalf of one another, it is not simply love for one another that is called into question, but our ultimate love for Christ.

Because the connection that is made here is unmistakable: love for Christ will give evidence of itself in the strenuous efforts toward others within the body of Christ.

So, Paul has said I thank God for all of you, why? Because you are a truly Christ-exalting church. You have

- Works produced by allegiance to Christ
- Toil Motivated by Affection for Christ
- Now finally, **Endurance Sustained by Anticipation of Christ**

As we mentioned last week, the church in Thessalonica was a church that was awaiting the return of Christ.

Longing for the second coming of Christ was part of their spiritual DNA.

The Thessalonians did not think of Christ the way that they use to think of their pagan gods: as some deity in the sky who they just wanted to keep happy until they died.

No, for the Thessalonians, Christ was a precious savior who was going to return to them and rescue them from the corrupt world and the coming judgement.

Now, the way that Paul is using the word “hope” here is not the way we commonly use the word hope.

When we say that we are hoping for something to happen, what we usually mean is that we have a strong desire for something to take place.

We are wishing for something to happen, but we can't be sure that it will.

That is not the way the New Testament uses the word.

Instead, the hope described here is a confident expectation of what we know will most certainly take place in the future.

It is an anticipation of what Christ has promised to do.

We said that faith produces works, and that love produces labor, and here we see that hope produces steadfastness –

Or we might say perseverance or endurance.

To eagerly await the fulfillment of what God has promised is what sustains our endurance under trial.

“My confidence and expectation is fixed on Christ fulfilling His word and on Christ returning to rescue me one day, and therefore I am able to persevere under trial.”

Now remember, the Thessalonian church was a church under persecution.

In chapter 2 Paul describes the sufferings that the Thessalonians were facing at the hands of their own countrymen.

In chapter 3 he lets them know that he is aware of the various afflictions that they face as a church.

And here we see what it is that sustained them through these trials: It was their hope in Christ.

The very nature of hope itself, as we’ve already described, is an expectation about something that Christ will do **in the future**.

It is a confident expectation of a future reality.

And in the midst of affliction, isn’t that what we need?

Something that takes our eyes off of the present and causes us to look to the future.

The hardest part of a prolonged affliction is the fact that it feels like at any moment your spirit could crack under the weight of the burden.

There is a sense in the midst of affliction that I just need to give up.

I just need to stop trying to respond righteously, because that isn't solving my problems.

I need to stop trusting that the Lord is good, because this suffering says otherwise.

I need to go back to the old ways, because clearly the path of honoring Christ through the difficulty is just not worth it.

If honoring Christ during the affliction won't stop the heartache, then what's it good for?

But when our hearts are tempted in these ways, what are we doing?

We are looking to present sufferings as if they define what is true.

But biblical hope says, "No, my present sufferings do not tell me what is true about God, but His very own promises tell me what is true."

Romans 8:18 (NASB95)

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

This is what Paul is thanking God for in the lives of the Thessalonians:

You have fixed your hope on Christ, and I can see the fruit of it in your endurance.

Three Evidences of a Christ-Exalting Church

1. Works Produced by Allegiance to Christ
2. Toil Motivated by Affection for Christ
3. Endurance Sustained by Anticipation of Chris