

THE MODEL CHURCH: A STRONG CHURCH OR WORK

1 THESSALONIANS 01:01–04

Introduction

The introductory verses give us a clear picture of a strong church. The picture painted in these verses is a model for all churches. It is the picture of a church strong in carrying on a work for the Lord.

- I. It is a church that has ministers who are faithful to the church (v. 1).
- II. It is a church of the people (v. 1).
- III. It is a church founded in God and in the Lord (v. 1).
- IV. It is a church possessing God's supreme gifts: grace and peace (v. 1).
- V. It is a church that stirs prayer (v. 2).
- VI. It is a church stirred up to work (v. 3).
- VII. It is a church seen to be chosen by God (v. 4).

I. *1 Thessalonians 01:01 Church with Faithful Ministers*

A strong church has ministers who are faithful to the church. Note that Paul was not writing this letter alone. Silas and Timothy joined him in exhorting the church. Why is this an exhortation from three ministers? Because these particular ministers had been the three who had founded and ministered to the church throughout the early years of its ministry. Of course Paul had been the head minister, but the other two had worked just as faithfully for the Lord in their call to be associates.

The point is this: the Thessalonica church was strong because its ministers had remained faithful to the church. From every indication they had continued to stay in touch with the church and to exhort the believers through visits and letters as long as they were living and able to minister.

- => Paul visited the church when he returned to the area on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-2).
- => Timothy made a special visit to the church for the very purpose of helping the church through a difficult time and to establish and comfort the believers in their faith (1 Th. 3:1-6).
- => All three ministers wrote the church at least two times, this letter of First Thessalonians and the second letter to the Thessalonians (1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1).

Thought 1. How many churches lack strength because their ministers have not remained faithful in exhorting them...

- to follow on with the Lord?
 - to follow and support their present ministers?
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Note how Paul, probably the greatest minister who has ever lived, acknowledged Silas and Timothy as equal to him.

Acts 14:21-22 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

Titus 2:11-15 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

II. *1 Thessalonians 01:01 Church of the People*

A strong church is a church of the people. Paul did not address the letter to “the church at Thessalonica,” but to “the church of the Thessalonians.” The church was the people, the people who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Without people who are committed to the Lord there is no church. The letter was not addressed to a particular group of leaders, but to all the people of the church. Every believer was important, and it took every one of them to make up the church. A strong church is a church of the people, a church...

- that is comprised of all the people.
- that is built upon all the people.
- that acknowledges the importance of all the people.
- that involves and uses the gifts of all the people.
- that recognizes and esteems the presence and contribution of all the people.

Thought 1. Several things will always weaken a church:

=> Building the church upon a few people or leaders.

=> Ignoring and neglecting the needs of some members.

=> Failing to involve and use the gifts of some members.

Rom 12:3-5 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Cor 12:12-14 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Eph 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

III. *1 Thessalonians 01:01 Church Founded in Jesus Christ*

A strong church is founded “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is said to be equal with God the Father. God is acknowledged as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the distinctive belief upon which the church is built. We believe that “God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

- ⇒ We believe that God the Father sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to save us from perishing and to give us eternal life.
- ⇒ We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- ⇒ We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord sent from heaven, that He is God, the eternal Son embodied in human flesh and sent to earth by God the Father.
- ⇒ We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is Jesus the Carpenter from Nazareth.
- ⇒ We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Christ, the Messiah and Saviour who had been promised from the very beginning of history.

As stated, it is upon this confession that the church is built. This confession is the one distinctive mark of the church.

Thought 1. A church that is not founded upon *God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* is not a church, not a true church, no matter what it may call itself. It is nothing more than...

- a man-created fellowship
- a man-created assembly
- a man-created meeting
- a man-created gathering
- a man-created body
- a man-created worship

Mat 16:15-18 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Mat 21:42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”

Acts 4:11 He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’

Rom 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Eph 2:20 Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

1 Pet 2:6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

1 John 2:22-23 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 4:15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

IV. 1 Thessalonians 01:01 God’s Gifts of Grace and Peace

A strong church possesses God’s supreme gifts — grace and peace.

1. Grace (charis) means the undeserved favour and blessings of God (see *Grace*, Tit. 2:11-15: note, Rom. 4:16; note and *Grace*, 1 Cor. 1:4). No church can be strong...
 - without the favour of God.
 - without the blessings of God.

When we see a strong church, the hand of God is immediately noticed: the hand that favours the church and blesses it. What is it that brings the hand of God’s grace to a church? Note the exact wording of this verse: “To the church...in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.” Grace comes from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. God pours His grace out upon the church that commits itself to the confession...

- that God is our Father.
- that Jesus is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church that really commits itself to this confession is the church that God favours and blesses, that experiences the outpouring of His grace. Every strong church is a church that is confessing God to be the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and confessing the Lord Jesus Christ to be the one and only Son of God. When this confession is forcefully made and demonstrated by a church, it is then that the grace (favour and blessings) of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ pours forth.

Eph 1:2-3 *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

Eph 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Eph 3:7-8 *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

1 Tim 1:14-15 *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.*

2. Peace (eirene) means to be bound, joined and woven together. It means to be assured, confident and secure in the love and care of God. It means to sense and know that God will...

- guide
- deliver
- provide
- encourage
- strengthen
- empower
- sustain
- bless

But again, note that peace comes only from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to have the peace of God and Christ, a church has to have a strong confession...

- in God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- in Jesus as the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father and Christ alone can bring peace to the hearts of men, and that peace can be given only to those who come to God for peace. The Father and Christ cannot give peace to a person who does not come to God for peace.

The point is this: a strong church is a body of people who know and experience the peace of God as they walk throughout the world day by day.

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Rom 8:6 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

Eph 2:13-14 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

V. 1 Thessalonians 01:02 Church Stirs Prayer

A strong church stirs prayer. This is a crucial trait, for God has ordained prayer to be the medium through which He blesses and moves in behalf of people.

Mat 21:22 *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

James 4:1-3 *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Why has God chosen prayer to be the medium through which He acts for man? Because sharing and talking together are the way all persons communicate, fellowship and commune together. This is true both with men and God. Prayer requires our presence, sharing and talking; and God wants to fellowship and commune with us. Few persons heed this fact; few persons take prayer seriously. Nevertheless a strong church encourages people to pray, and it stirs people to pray for it and its ministry. Note that Paul gave thanks to God always for the Thessalonian church.

VI. 1 Thessalonians 01:03 Church that Works

A strong church is a church that is stirred up and aroused to work. Three things stir and arouse the church to work.

1. Faith stirs the church to work. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, truly believes, he is stirred to work and serve the Lord Jesus. The same is true with a body of believers, the church. The stronger the belief of the people in Christ, the stronger they will work for the Lord. A strong faith stirs, arouses, activates and energizes believers to work and carry out the mission of Christ.

Eph 6:16 *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

James 2:14-17 *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,”*

but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

2. Love stirs the church to work. The word “work” (kopou) means to toil; to labour to the point of exhaustion; to arduously labour. When a person truly loves Christ, he is prompted and driven to arduously labour for Christ. Note: the believer who is driven by love is the believer who has really seen the love of Christ. He is always conscious that Christ has taken his sins upon Himself and borne the punishment for them. The believer knows that he is ever so short of the glory of God, and that he deserves to be punished as the transgressor of God’s law. But he knows and walks around with the deep sense that Christ bore his punishment for him. It is the wonderful love of Christ that stirs the believer to love Christ ever so much. Therefore, he does all he can to please Christ and to fulfil the joy of Christ. This is what Paul meant when he said “Christ’s love compels me” to serve Him (see 2 Cor. 5:14-16).

2 Cor 5:14-15 *For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Mat 22:39 *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’*

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

Rom 13:8-10 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

1 Th 3:12 *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

Heb 10:24- 25 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

3. Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ stirs the church to endure in its work and labour. The word “endurance” (hupomones) means steadfastness, perseverance. Our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ: we know He will...

- guide
- strengthen
- provide
- sustain
- deliver
- bless

In addition, we know that the Lord is going to transfer us into heaven at the end of this life and reward us according to our labour here on earth. Therefore, strong believers and churches are driven to endure in hope — to continue on in their arduous labour for Christ. (See *Inheritance*, Rom. 8:17.)

Thought 1. There are several reasons why a man works.

=> There is forced labour: a man is forced to work.

=> There is a sense of duty: a man feels obligated to work.

=> There is the need to meet necessities: a man has needs that have to be met.

=> There is the wish to gain more: a man works to build up wealth.

When a man accepts Christ, his motive for working changes. He now serves and works for Christ (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1). His faith in the new world Christ is creating stirs him to work for Christ. His love for Christ and for others stirs him to work in order to share the gospel with the world (1 Th. 1:6-9). His hope in the return of Christ to set up His kingdom causes him to labour with endurance (1 Th. 1:3).

Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Col 1:5 *The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel.*

2 Th 2:16-17 *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

1 Pet 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you.*

VII. *1 Thessalonians 01:04 Church, Chosen by God*

A strong church is seen to be chosen by God. The word “chosen” (*eklogen*) means that the church has been selected and chosen by God. This means two things.

1. Believers are chosen by God to be His beloved people. God has called believers out of the world and away from the old life which the world offered, the old life of sin and death. He has called believers to be separated and set apart to Himself and the new life He offers, the new life of righteousness and eternity.

Jer 31:3 The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 16:27 “No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Eph 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

2. Believers are chosen to be brothers loved by God; they are called to hold one another ever so closely to their hearts and to count one another as precious and deeply loved.

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Rom 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.

1 Cor 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Eph 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Phil 2:1-2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Col 3:12 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

2 Pet 1:5-7 *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.*

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

Thought 1. Note two strong lessons.

- 1) The proof that a church is truly chosen by God is that...
 - the members act like the loved people of God.
 - the members treat each other as loved brothers.
- 2) A people can show that being chosen is only a false profession...
 - by acting like they are not the loved of God — living in sin and shame, dirt and pollution, worldliness and greed.
 - by treating one another as anything but brothers loved by God: being critical and divisive, prideful and arrogant, angry and hurtful, envious and prejudiced, superior and super-spiritual.

Rom 8:33 *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*

2 Tim 2:10 *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

1 Pet 1:2 *Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. ■*