

Faith, Hope, Love

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We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 NKJV

Paul begins this epistle with a warm commendation of the Thessalonian Christians. They were always on his mind. They were always in his prayers. Paul had had some very anxious times in Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1-9). This might cause a man of less noble character to put them out of his mind, to close the book on the city and its people. That is often the result when one has unpleasant experiences in a place. But, Paul remembered them continuously and with much pleasure. He gave thanks for them before God's throne.

Work of Faith

He remembers without ceasing their "work of faith," i.e. their work that faith produced. Faith is the basis of everything we do. It is more than a passing acknowledgment of Christ's deity, more than a brief confession of His lordship. The word "faith" has been vastly changed in the hands of Calvinistic teachers.

It did not mean to believe something without evidence. To the contrary, the word in the plural is often translated "the proofs," that is the evidence, the things that inspire confidence. It expressed a high degree of confidence based on strong evidence.

Faith without works is really a contradiction of terms. But for the desire to enjoy faith's benefits without labor's weariness, such a thing would never be contemplated. Faith and inactivity are direct opposites.

This is true because God requires us to be active. He created us for activity (Ephesians 2:10). One example of the Thessalonians' activity was that they "sounded forth" the word not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also "in every place." Their faith had produced this.

Faith always produces works. Works are therefore a pretty good measure of one's faith. If you want to know how much faith a man has, look at what he does.

Labor of Love

Labor is distinguished from work in that labor is difficult work. It is wearisome toil. "Work"

is the more general term; labor, more specific. Work may be pleasant or unpleasant. Labor is troublesome and dreary.

But, love makes toil more bearable. Jacob served seven years for his wife, Rachel (Genesis 29:20). It was hard work. Yet, it “seemed but a few days because of the love he had for her.” Love makes labor more bearable, and the time passes faster. The Thessalonians had received the word in much affliction. Their job was difficult from the beginning. But, they could tolerate the difficulty because of the “joy” they felt (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Love renders even difficult things joyous.

Patience of Hope

“Patience” means the ability to hold out under stress. The word Paul used means “remaining under” or “remaining absolutely,” that is, digging in and holding out, staying power under difficulty. Hope makes it possible to hold out under stress. Hope is the vivid. This is about expectation of success or relief, of reward. When the human mind, filled with joy and love, projects itself into the future, partaking of the bliss and honor due to the faithful, this hope makes difficulty more bearable. The Thessalonians concentrated not on the miseries of the moment but on the rewards of the future. Their vivid hope inspired a commendable endurance. “Patience” (endurance) grows out of hope. Hopeful Christians can summon courage, persistence and strength that others, less hopeful, never know.

But, when hope goes, endurance goes. People who lose hope lose their courage. Faith is the basis of what we hope for (Hebrews 11:1). So the word of God is the source of hope. The Bible (Romans 10:17) provides first faith and love, then endurance and joy, then persistence in good works.