

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 10, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

*Steadfast*  
**CHRISTIANITY**  
*A Study of Second Thessalonians*

**“A Healthy Church”**  
*2 Thessalonians 1:1-5*

We have just completed our study of 1 Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul’s first letter to these exceptional believers at this Macedonian town. Much of what we said concerning 1 Thessalonians we can also say concerning 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians.

As we said before concerning Paul’s first letter, emerging from ancient Macedonia was a dynamic body of people who lived in the busy, free, affluent metropolis of Thessalonica (show map). This town’s citizens were influential, its economy was stable, and its location along the earliest known, “freeway” – Via Egnatia – was enviable. Goods from the east and the west poured into this city. In its heyday, when the population was around two hundred thousand, some consideration was given to making Thessalonica, rather than Constantinople, the “capital” of the world. In the first century A.D., the evangelist and apostle Paul ventured into Thessalonica and, during a brief visit, formed a body of believers there who comprised the city’s first Christian church. And what a dynamic group they were! With determination, zeal, confidence, and a Pauline style, they proclaimed the good news of Christ like thunder rolling through a canyon. As we saw in our study of 1 Thessalonians, these first-century saints were models of authentic Christianity. They made Christianity contagious to many in their day. Even in the face of extreme persecution they lived out their faith as shining examples and Paul commended them for it in his first letter. Now, in the second, not much has changed... perhaps only months have passed and now Paul writes to them to encourage them to be steadfast in the faith and to continue on. So in the way of both introduction and review let’s be reminded of some of the important background information for both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians.



### Background Review of 2 Thessalonians:

- (1) Like 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul and was the second letter ever written by Paul
- (2) The church of Thessalonica was established during Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey \*show map
- (3) The Thessalonian church was very important/strategic because Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia
- (4) 2 Thessalonians was written after commending the church at Thessalonica for having a contagious faith in Paul's first letter to them, and now in his second letter he is encouraging them to continue to be steadfast in their faith even in the face of challenges.
- (5) Paul wrote 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians only a short time after his first letter, perhaps within months of the 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians.

With that brief background let's look let's get back into Paul's letter to the believer/Christians in 2 Thessalonians.

### **READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

*"<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, <sup>4</sup> so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, <sup>5</sup> which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer."* -2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 (NKJV)

**What makes for a healthy church, in your opinion?**

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We know that God is more interested in the spiritual health of a church than its numeric growth. A spiritually thriving church will be reaching people with the gospel and seeing people added to the church, but a church focused only on growth may be seeing people added without true conversion or spiritual maturity.

But what does a healthy church look like? What are its defining characteristics?

No church “arrives” in spiritual maturity. Even as we as individual Christians must guard our hearts against coldness to the Lord or backsliding, so entire churches can become lukewarm spiritually. (See Revelation 3:14–16.)

So what does a healthy church look like? Dr. Paul Chappell gives us these five characteristics of a healthy church:



**Five Characteristics of a Healthy Church: by Dr. Paul Chappell**

1. **A Biblical Purpose** - *Many modern-day churches have a consumer mentality in which attenders think the church exists to meet my needs.* But the church isn’t about me or you. It exists to bring honor to Christ. Colossians 1:18 says, *“<sup>18</sup> And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”* A healthy church has a clearly understood purpose, and that purpose is clearly affixed to biblical mandates. Here are few of what those ought to be...
  - **Loving God** - *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”* (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).
  - **Growing Together** - *“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Ephesians 4:14–16).
  - **Serving Others** - *“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”* (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

That is why we exist as a church and what our purpose is on a week-to-week basis.

2. **A Spiritual Passion** - Only the Holy Spirit can develop a passion in people’s hearts for the things of God. Leaders may be able to encourage (or coerce) people in spiritual activity, but without the Holy Spirit’s work, there is no abiding change in people’s lives—no overcoming habitual sin, no ongoing walk with God, no being transformed into the image of Christ. A healthy church is one in which people *enjoy* a walk with Christ! *Relationship with a religion or with a spiritual leader rather than with Christ is not what the church is about and does not bring joy.* Paul pointed this out to the Galatians who had fallen under the yoke of the Judaizers. In trying to please the demands of the law and find their righteousness through the law (Galatians 2:21), these Galatian Christians had lost their “blessedness”—their joy (Galatians

4:15). Spiritual passion takes place in the hearts of people who are saved and are led by the Spirit of God. Thus, healthy churches teach Christians what it means to walk in the Spirit. As Paul wrote in Galatians 5:16-17, *“<sup>16</sup> I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”*

3. **An Uncompromised Position** - A healthy church takes an uncompromising stand for the faith. It is a church willing to “earnestly contend for the faith.” Jude 3 says, *“<sup>3</sup> Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* A biblical, New Testament church stands on the sole authority of the Word of God. It should be distinctly biblical from the surrounding culture, and it should make no apology for that. People should hear God’s Word preached, and questions should be answered from Scripture. I love the quote by John Adams, *“It is the duty of clergy to accommodate their discourses to the times, to preach against sins as are most prevalent and to recommend such virtues as are most wanted.”* Biblical relevance isn’t about adjusting our position to the changing culture; it is about boldly stating the truth that is relevant to the needs of our culture. A healthy church isn’t afraid to take a strong position for truth. But because it is filled with people who love the Lord and are growing in Him, it takes such a stand graciously—like Jesus, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).
 
4. **An Endowment of Power** - A healthy church is not one where every Christian is frantically trying to do the work of God, but one in which God’s power is working through Christians diligent in their witness and service. As Charles Spurgeon said, *“Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind or chariots without steeds.”* This is such a great verse in Zechariah 4:6, *“So he answer and said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.’”* And Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:21, *“<sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”* Throughout the book of Acts, we see that God’s power, especially for witness, also comes through prayer. A healthy church is one in which members faithfully pray—privately and corporately. That is what scripture says about the early New Testament church in Acts 4:31, *“<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”*

5. **A Growing Leadership** - Just as a church doesn’t “arrive” spiritually, neither do its leaders. If the pastor and leadership are not continually growing, they will spiritually stagnate, become cold to the Lord, and be vulnerable to temptation. To lead a healthy church, a pastor must have a personal and growing walk with God. He must have an attitude like the Apostle Paul of *reaching forth* and *pressing forward* in his walk with God—not just settling in and content with simple Bible knowledge. Paul said in Philippians 3:13-14, *“<sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have <sup>14</sup> apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Take a moment now to review these five? Ask family in these areas? “How can I place a greater emphasis on nurturing spiritual health within the church?” “Am I supporting my church in these

areas? Am I seeing my church as a resource for me? Or am I seeing myself as part of a spiritual body and helping to strengthen the health of that body?

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Listen, there seems to be a shortage of healthy churches in our day. I get emails from people asking if I know of a good church in their city, but often I am hard pressed to endorse any. I often hear of or read about abusive churches, legalistic churches, dead churches, and shallow, feel-good churches. I am reading, more and more... almost daily, of some crazy things going on in churches...

- I recently read of one church (and you would recognize the pastor of this church) who has announced that they will be segregating their church... seriously they are doing this. If you are vaccinated you can sit on the main floor of their church, but if you're not you are not allowed to sit on the main floor of the church with the vaccinated people. If you are unvaccinated you are required to sit in the balcony or not attend church. \*I don't know what you think about the "COVID vaccine" whether you have chosen to be vaccinated or not, whether you are pro-vaccine or anti-vaccine... I don't know what you think about that and truthfully that is your business and not mine... I do think that is a personal decision you should make in consultation with your doctor, and that isn't really what bother's me about what that church is doing... it is just so divisive, so against what the Bible says about the body of Christ and what the church is to be about...
- I also read recently of a Baptist church in Washington, D.C. that called a married lesbian couple as its new pastors... this is happening all over our country and pretty much across denominational lines.
- I don't know if you say this but Harvard University, which was founded originally as a Christian college with the stated purpose "to train a literate clergy." The motto of Harvard is "Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae" which translates from Latin to "Truth for Christ and Church." Harvard recently hired an atheist as its chief chaplain. No kidding the chief chaplain at Harvard University is an atheist. Crazy"

These are just a few examples. More and more churches that claim to be evangelical are capitulating to the culture on Biblical moral standards. So when I hear about healthy, solid churches that preach the gospel and teach God's word, it brings me great joy and hope.

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians a few months after 1 Thessalonians to a church that had come into existence out of a pagan culture about 12-18 months before. As you would expect, it was not free of problems. No church is. They were experiencing trials and persecution. They were confused over some false teaching regarding the day of the Lord. It's amazing how quickly Satan infiltrates a church with false teaching! Some lazy church members were not working and were mooching off those who were. But in spite of the problems, it was a healthy church. They were growing in faith, love, and endurance under persecution. A simple outline is:

**A simple outline of 2 Thessalonians:**

- 1. Greetings, encouragement, instruction, and prayer in light of their suffering (1:1-12)**
- 2. Instruction, thanksgiving, and prayer in light of the day of the Lord (2:1-17)**
- 3. Prayer, instruction regarding lazy Christians, and closing prayer (3:1-18)**

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH (2 Thessalonians 1:1-5)

The opening verses (1:1-5) give us a brief sketch (although not a full view) of a healthy church:

*A healthy church is distinct from the world, bathed in the grace and peace of the gospel, growing in faith and love, and persevering in trials as it looks to God's kingdom.*

### 5 Characteristics of a Healthy Church: (based on 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5)

1. **A healthy church is distinct from the world** – Notice Paul's opening words in 2 Thessalonians 1:1, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." A little over a year before, there had not been a church of any kind in Thessalonica. Now, because Paul, Silas (Silvanus), and Timothy had preached the gospel there, a church had been born.

Although the Greek word for "church" was commonly used to refer to secular assemblies, it comes from two Greek words, meaning literally, "called-out ones."

Think of this... through the gospel, God has called His people out of this world to be distinct from the world's values, morals, and goals. Let's look at Jesus' prayer in John 17:14-17... Jesus prayed, "<sup>14</sup> I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." *What is Jesus telling us here about the church (God's people)?*

#### 3 things Jesus is saying about the church, believers, His church in John 17:

- (1) *The church is in the world, but not of the world, even as Jesus was in the world, but not of it -*
- (2) *The main thing that sets us apart (sanctifies us) from the world is that we have God's word of truth -*
- (3) *God's word tells us how He wants us to live as holy people*

#### How is the church to be distinctive from the world?:

- (1) *In its values* - We are to be distinct from the world in our values. The world values accumulating wealth as if this world is all that there is. But the church seeks to lay up treasures in heaven as we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33).
  - (2) *In its morals* - The world has relative moral standards that shift with the times. The world says, "It's okay to live together outside of the lifelong covenant of marriage, as long as you're in love." The world reasons, "If two people of the same sex are in love, why shouldn't they be allowed to get married? If a man decides that he really is a woman, what's wrong with that?"
  - (3) *In its virtue* - And tolerance for every kind of behavior, no matter how morally perverse, is the world's chief virtue. The world asks, "Why believe in the morals taught in an ancient book like the Bible?" We answer, "We believe it because Jesus believed it, and it is God's word of truth."
2. **A healthy church is bathed in the grace and peace of the gospel** – Look at verses 1-2 in our passage.... Paul writes, "<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in

*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* Although this is a typical greeting from Paul, as with all of his greetings and salutations, it is more than routine. And, although Paul does not mention or spell out the gospel here, it implicitly permeates this greeting.

The gospel which Paul preached included the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that he could mention *“the Lord Jesus Christ”* right next to *“God our Father,”* without any explanation, shows that he had taught these former unbelievers who were not saved and had never heard the truth, and were perhaps worshiping the false gods of the day that Jesus is fully God.

As we saw in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 & 7 (see, also, 2 Thess. 2:13), he also taught them about the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Christian faith is decidedly trinitarian. One sure mark of a false cult is that it denies the Trinity: There is one God who exists eternally in three persons: the Father; the Son; and, the Holy Spirit.

Paul extends grace and peace to this new church from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace are two of the most distinctive benefits in the lives of believers when we are saved:

**READ: Romans 5:1-8**

Paul writes in Romans 5:1-8, *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. <sup>6</sup> For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

**2 Distinctive Benefits of Believers: (based on Romans 5:1-8)**

- (1) **Grace** - Grace is God’s unmerited favor, shown to us in the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Grace means that God bestows all the blessings of salvation—eternal life, forgiveness of all our sins, and complete right standing with Him—as a free gift to those who deserve His wrath. We can’t do anything to merit or earn God’s grace. All we can do is receive it. As Paul says (Rom. 3:24), we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”
- (2) **Peace** - Peace refers to total well-being, but especially to the spiritual well-being that comes from being reconciled to God through Christ. His shed blood paid the penalty of our sins so that we are now at peace with God. It also broke down all barriers between us and other people, no matter what their ethnicity, so that we have peace with one another (Eph. 2:14). And, knowing that our sins are completely forgiven by God’s grace alone gives us inner peace in the midst of life’s trials. Through the gospel, we enter into a relationship with God as our Father. Like the father of the prodigal son in Jesus’ parable (Luke 15:11-32), the

heavenly Father is full of love and forgiveness when we repent and return to Him. He is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exod. 34:6). And the gospel calls us to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord. He bought us with His blood; we are His slaves.

And so healthy churches stand distinct from the world. They are bathed in the grace and peace of the gospel that comes to us from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. **A healthy church is increasing faith in God and love for one another** – Paul writes in verse 3 of our passage, “<sup>3</sup> *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.*” By thanking God for their growth in faith and love, rather than congratulating the Thessalonians for their progress, Paul is acknowledging that these qualities come from God. While we are responsible to grow in faith and love, we can only do so as we depend on the indwelling Spirit’s power. Pray for yourself, your family members, and for other Christians that God would increase faith in Him and love for others. Let’s consider these two characteristics that Paul mentions in 1 Thessalonians 1:3

### 2 Specific Characteristics of Healthy Churches:

- (1) **A healthy church has increasing faith in God** - Paul has a unique emphasis here when he says, “*We are bound to thank God always for your ...*” and adds that such “*... as is fitting.*” The phrase “*we are bound*” means, “*we are under obligation*” to thank God. ***Why do you think Paul would say it like this... “we are under obligation to thank God always for your, as is fitting...”? Because clearly, He (God) is behind this growth.***

F.F. Bruce says, “He may have added, “as is (only) fitting,” because he had heard that the Thessalonians were protesting that his earlier praise of them was excessive.” (F. F. Bruce, Word Biblical Commentary, 1 & 2 Thessalonians [Thomas Nelson], p. 144). So Paul is encouraging them by saying that their evident growth in faith and love shows that God is truly at work in their hearts.

We come to God through initial faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We believe God’s promise that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life (John 3:16). But such faith is not a one-time event, where we believe and it’s over with. Rather, our faith in God and the many promises of His word must grow. The difficult news is that such growth usually comes through trials. You’re cruising along, thinking that you’re trusting in Jesus, when, “Wham!” you get hit with something difficult. It may be a health problem, the loss of a job, a family crisis, or something else that is beyond your ability to handle. What should you do? If you grumble and complain, accusing God of not caring about you, your faith will shrink. If you call out to Him as your loving, gracious Father, trusting that He has your best interests at heart in this crisis, your faith will grow as you see the sufficiency of His “*exceedingly great and precious promises*” (2 Peter 1:4).

**ILLUSTRATION:** This is illustrated in Israel’s history. God miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt through the ten plagues. He opened the Red Sea so that they could cross it as if on dry land. He closed the sea back over Pharaoh’s advancing troops. Then



they went three days into the wilderness and found no water (Exod. 15:22). What a great opportunity to trust in the Lord, who had just proven Himself to be a mighty deliverer! So what did the people do? They grumbled at Moses, which was really to grumble at the Lord. The Lord responded by graciously meeting their need and giving them a further promise of protection. But they responded by further grumbling, accusing Moses of bringing them all into the wilderness to kill them by hunger. God again graciously responded by providing daily manna. But because of their continual grumbling, God eventually swore in His wrath that that generation would not enter into His rest (Ps. 95:7-11; Heb. 3:7-11). After citing this judgment, Hebrews 3:12 warns us, *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."* When Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:3, *"...because your faith grows exceedingly..."* he uses a word that is only used here in the New Testament... nowhere else. It has the nuance of vigorous growth. As verse 4 mentions, this growth was taking place in the midst of severe persecutions and afflictions. ★ So if you're facing a severe trial, take care! You can either have an evil, unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God, or your faith can grow vigorously as you trust in Him and see His faithfulness to His promises.

(2) *A healthy church has increasing love for one another* - Paul often couples faith and love:

- 1 Corinthians 13:2 – *"<sup>2</sup> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."*
- Ephesians 1:15 – *"<sup>15</sup> Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints."*
- Ephesians 3:17 – *"<sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love."*
- Ephesians 6:23 - *"<sup>23</sup> Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*
- Colossians 1:4 – *"<sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints."*
- 1 Thessalonians 1:3 – *"<sup>3</sup> 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."*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:6 – *"<sup>6</sup> But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you."*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:8 – *"<sup>8</sup> But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of."*
- 1 Timothy 1:5 – *"<sup>5</sup> Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith."*
- 1 Timothy 1:14 – *"<sup>14</sup> And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."*
- 1 Timothy 2:15 – *"<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."*
- 1 Timothy 4:12 – *"<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."*
- 2 Timothy 1:13 – *"<sup>13</sup> Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."*

- 2 Timothy 2:22 – “<sup>22</sup> Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”
- Philemon 1:5 – “<sup>5</sup> hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.”

***Why do you think the Apostle Paul so often ties these two (faith and love) together?***

Increasing love for one another flows out of growing faith in the Lord Jesus, who commanded us to love one another even as He loved us (John 13:34-35).

- Paul had commended the Thessalonians for their love (1 Thess. 1:3)
  - He prayed that their love would increase and abound (1 Thess. 3:12)
  - And again commended them for their love, urging them to excel still more (1 Thess. 4:9-10).
  - Now he had heard that their love was growing ever greater
- \*This means that we never arrive at a point where we can check love off our list for prayer and growth.***

The place where you can practice growing in love is with those who are in the closest proximity to you every day... your family and loved ones, your friends, your church family, etc. Selfishness is the major impediment to love. So to grow in love, you must think about the other person's needs ahead of your own. You must lay aside your rights and sacrifice your time and effort for the other person.

Listen to Paul's words in Philippians 2:3-4, “<sup>3</sup> Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” And again in Colossians 3:12-14, “<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. <sup>14</sup> But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

Before we leave verse 3, ask yourself, “Is my faith in God in the midst of trials growing, or am I grumbling? Is my love for others in my family and in this church growing?” If you're at odds with anyone, go to them as soon as possible and ask forgiveness for any wrongs that you have committed and seek to be reconciled to them. Jesus said that such reconciliation is even more important than your worship (Matt. 5:22-24)

4. **A healthy church perseveres in faith in the midst of difficult trials** – Notice Paul's words in verse 4, “<sup>4</sup> so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.” Persevering in faith in the midst of difficult trials is not automatic! Trials test the genuineness of our faith.

#### **READ: Matthew 13:3-8 & 18-23**

In His “Parable of the Sower,” Jesus spoke about the seed sown on the rocky soil that withers when the hot sun beats down on the new plant (Mt.13:5-6). He explained in Matthew 13:20-21 “<sup>20</sup> But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and

*immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.*"

The key is to send down deep roots in the word when times are easier so that you will not wither in a time of trouble.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 also links persevering in a time of trial to our faith in the Lord and having deep roots... listen to it, *"<sup>7</sup> Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.<sup>8</sup> For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit."* The key to trusting the Lord and sending down roots is to do it daily in the smaller trials that we all encounter. Then you'll have a pattern for faith when bigger trials hit.

One of the most important habits that you can develop is to spend time in God's word and prayer every morning. I try to read a Psalm, as well as a portion from both the Old and New Testaments. You're free to do whatever works for you, but the main thing is to do it as consistently as you eat. God's word is daily food for your soul. I enjoy the Psalms because they were written in the trenches of life's trials.

Thus a healthy church is distinct from the world and bathed in God's grace and peace through the gospel. It has growing faith in God and love for one another. It perseveres in faith in the midst of difficult trials.

5. **A healthy church views its suffering in light of the kingdom of God** - Listen to 2 Thessalonians 1:5 Paul writes about their faith in the midst of their trials... *"<sup>5</sup> which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer."*

Gary Shogren (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 1 & 2 Thessalonians [Zondervan], p. 246) translates verse 5 this way, *"[All of this gives] evidence that God will pronounce a right verdict, which will result in you being considered worthy of God's kingdom, for which you are also suffering."* When we go through severe trials, we tend to think that God has forsaken us and is not working out His plan for us. But Paul is saying, "Quite the contrary!" He wants us to understand that suffering is often the means God uses to work out His eternal purpose and prepare us for His kingdom.

Paul had already taught these new Christians that we are destined for such afflictions (1 Thess. 3:3). This was a common theme for Paul. When he and Barnabas revisited the new churches that they had just founded, Acts 14:22 summarizes that they were *"<sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

The idea in verse 5 of our passage is not that suffering somehow qualifies us for being worthy of God's kingdom. That would make salvation a matter of human works or merit. Rather, persevering in suffering is an evidence that God is working in us, preparing us for His eternal

kingdom, when we will escape His righteous judgment through the blood of Christ, but unbelievers will be judged (vv. 6-10).

Writing to a persecuted church, Peter expressed a similar idea in 1 Peter 1:6-7... he wrote, “<sup>6</sup> *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been <sup>7</sup>grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

## CONCLUSION

I recently had a message from my dentist’s office reminding me that it’s time for my annual checkup. I think my teeth and my dental health is pretty healthy, but a checkup will either confirm it or reveal some problems.

Are we a healthy church?

Paul’s introduction here isn’t a thorough checkup, but we should ask these question...

### **5 Healthy Church Questions We Need to Ask Ourselves:**

- 1. Because of the gospel, are we standing distinct from the world?**
- 2. Are we bathed in God’s grace and peace through the gospel?**
- 3. Are we growing in faith and love?**
- 4. Are we persevering in our trials?**
- 5. And, are we viewing our trials in light of God’s coming kingdom?**

### **Application Questions**

1. How can we know which (if any) of God’s commands (the role of women, homosexuality, divorce, etc.) are relative to the culture and which apply in every time and culture?
2. How would you counsel a young believer who thinks that his trials must mean that God doesn’t love him? What Scriptures would you use?
3. Why is it crucial to trust God and not grumble in minor trials before major trials hit?
4. How does our text refute the popular “prosperity gospel” heresy, which promises that if you have enough faith, God will make you rich and healthy?