

When the Butler's returned from Germany, Pastor Bill told me that he was going to ask me to fill in for him on several Sundays. With that in mind, I began to prepare.

I thought about CBC being a church-plant. I began to envision what kind of church I would like CBC to become( if I had anything to say about it). I thought about the advantages of starting a new work. One benefit is that a new church can establish its own traditions. I have been in quite a few churches in 63 years. And I have seen quite a few traditions.

I attended one church that plastered the altar with Easter lilies in Resurrection Sunday. I have been in a church that took a major part of the morning service on Mothers' Day to give out awards to mothers for various reasons: youngest mother, newest mother, mother with the most children, mother with most grandchildren, etc. We attended a church that held a costume party every year for Halloween. I know of a church that holds a Valentine's Day banquet every February. I once attended a church whose pastor preached 25 minutes on the dot. The service started at 11:00am on the dot. The service ended at noon – on the dot.

We could debate the pros and cons of these traditions. But there are absolutely no biblical grounds for any of these activities that congregations have adopted as "traditions".

What do you want CBC to look like? I ask, because whatever we do now will eventually form the basis for traditions that will be practiced for years to come. But, not just activities. What kind of church do you want CBC to become?

As I thought about this, I concluded, "Well I certainly don't want CBC to be like the church in Corinth". The congregation was divided. Some claimed that they followed Paul. Others bragged that they were followers of Apollos. But the really spiritual members boasted their allegiance to Christ. The congregation turned a blind eye to immorality. The church battled over the use of spiritual gifts. Some were abusing the Lord's Supper. And another group challenged the authority of the Apostle Paul. What a mess !

Then I thought about the church in Galatia. I don't want CBC to be like the believers in Galatia. There was a movement in the congregation to abandon salvation by faith and to return to the Law. Paul used strong words when he asked, "Oh foolish Galatians – who has bewitched you?" Wayne Barber used to say that Paul's letter to the Galatians was like Paul writing to the Romans when he was angry".

Then, I thought, "What if we could be like the church in Thessalonica?" With the exception of a few verses, Paul had very little to say to the believers in Thessalonica that was negative. He corrected a misunderstanding about 2 related items - (1) the future of believers who had died and (2) the promise of the Rapture of the Church. The rest is positive.

I read through 1 Thessalonians several times – each time making note of anything positive that Paul mentions in his letter. I concluded that if CBC has an opportunity to establish a unique character – a very special identity while we are still small. I want CBC to look like the congregation in Thessalonica. This morning I want to present 3 of those characteristics.

Paul does not take long to get to the list. Paul begins the letter to the Thessalonians with a commendation. I hope you agree with me that it would be a wonderful goal for us to incorporate these characteristics into our fellowship ....

***1 Thes 1:2,3 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,...***

This morning I want to focus on their "work of faith", their "Labor of love", and the "steadfastness of their hope".

## 1. Their work of faith

Look at the way Paul chose to arrange the words. Paul did not say, "Your faith is at work". Their faith was at work. Because of their faith, they were doing wonderful things. They earned a commendation from the Apostle Paul. If Paul had written, "Your faith is at work", the subject of the sentence would be "faith". Paul makes the subject of the sentence "work". The focus is not on the fact that they had believed. Paul moves beyond their conversion. His focus is on what they have done since they were saved and what they continue to do because they are saved.

What does it mean to demonstrate a "work of faith" ?

"work" - Strong's 2041 *er-gon*

From a primary (but obsolete) ergo (to work);

toil (as an effort or occupation); by implication, an act: deed, doing, labor, work

Ergon is a very common word in the New Testament. It is used 174 times. We can conclude that a "work of faith" is a work, an activity, a deed or an effort to reach out to others. These works were coming out of their faith. These activities were the natural result of their faith.

Paul does not give us a list of what they did. I think that we can conclude that once the Thessalonians had believed in Christ, they ministered to one another. We will see in a bit, they were being persecution. When they saw a need, they met the need. When they saw a problem, they responded. When they saw a brother or sister facing difficulties as a Christian, they stepped up and offered support. They were not passive. They were active. And Paul was impressed.

Pastor Bill is walking us through the book of James. When Paul highlighted the "work" of the Thessalonian believers, he was in full agreement with James ....

***James 2:14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?***

***James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.***

***James 2:18 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."***

***James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?***

Faith leads to action. When Paul prayed for the believers in Thessalonica, this was part of his prayer. He thanked God for the work that they were doing.

***1 Thes 1:1-3a 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. <sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; <sup>3</sup> constantly bearing in mind your work of faith ...***

This is no small deal. For Paul, this was a big deal. The believers in Thessalonica ministered to one another - they supported one another. This is how they lived. This was a characteristic of their Christian community.

A little over a year ago, I shared a message based on Ephesians 2:10... a passage that talks about works...

***Ephesians 2:8-10*** <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

One consequence of salvation should be good works in the life of a believer. God saves us to do good works. God not only saves us to be active in good works. He goes before us to prepare the opportunities for good works.

Acts 10: Preaching to the family of Cornelius <sup>38</sup> ***You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.***

Aren't we supposed to be like Jesus?

I return to my original question: What do I want CBC to look like? I want CBC to be an active church – a serving church. When new people come to CBC, one of the first things that they should see is that we care about one another. They should know that if someone has a problem – if someone has a need – the congregation will be there to help. That's what the church in Thessalonica was doing. And Paul commends them for it. Paul congratulates them for it.

What did this “work of faith” look like 2000 years ago? We don't know. Paul doesn't give us a clue. We only know that they were active. They were serving. They were meeting needs.

What does it look like today? I can give a recent example – Val sold his house. Val had to vacate the house. Val had to move to a new residence. Did he call a moving company? He could have. But he didn't. Why not? He didn't have to call a moving company because the “church”, the body of believers known as CBC showed up. They served. They met the need.

I shared a second sermon last summer. In week #1 we saw that once saved, we do good works because God prepares good works for us to do. In week #2 I talked about Titus. Writing to Pastor Titus, Paul makes 5 points about doing good things ....

**Titus 2:7 .... show yourself to be an example of good deeds**

**Titus 2:14 .... a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds**

**Titus 3:1 ... to be ready for every good deed,**

**Titus 3:8 .... be careful to engage in good deeds.**

**Titus 3:14 .... Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds**

What do I want CBC to look like? I want to see a congregation that is active. A congregation ready to meet needs. A congregation that cares about others in the name of Jesus.

## **2. Their Labor of love**

The second thing that Paul identifies in the church in Thessalonica is their “labor of love”. The word “work” was a general term used throughout the NT. The word for “labor” (kopos) is less common. It is only used 18 times. And it is more intense.

Labor – Strong’s 2873. Kōpos - a cut, (by analogy) toil (as reducing the strength), literally or figuratively: by implication – labor + trouble, weariness

The Thessalonians were not just working, which gave evidence of their faith. They were laboring. They were toiling. They devoted themselves to each other until they were tired. But they kept on. Why? Because of love. It was their “labor of love”. Labor that proceeds from love.

Paul does the same thing here that he did with “work of faith”. “Work” was the subject. Work was the focus.

Here, Paul could have said, “Your love labors through hard times”. But he didn’t. That would make “love” the focus. No. Paul writes, “your labor of love”. The focus is on their commitment to each other.

Things were hard in Thessalonica for the believers. Again, Paul does not give details. But we do read these words....

**1 Thessalonians 2:14 (NASB) <sup>14</sup> For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,...**

The believers in Thessalonica were facing persecution. If we go back to that time, we think of arenas, lions and brutality. Persecution does not always have to be physical. You do not have to be beaten or imprisoned to be persecuted.

Example: We moved to Peñarroya in 1988. One of the first things we did was to establish an AWANA club. It was a new tool in Spain . In fact, we had the third club that was ever established.

We did not have a building big enough for the game circle. So we met in the park and made the circle in the dirt. Oh – the rumors spread through the town. “Watch out for the evangelicals”. “Don’t listen to the evangelicals”. “Keep your children away from the evangelicals”. In fact, parents were told that if they allowed their children to attend our meeting in the park, they would not be allowed to celebrate First Communion.

But a small group of children came each Saturday morning. We sang. We told Bible stories. And, we played games. Some adults would stop and listen. Most passed on by.

One of those who attended was 12-year old, Juanito. He went home from every meeting with enthusiasm. His mother began to think, “If the evangelicals are so bad, why is Juanito so excited?”. So Trini came to the park on Saturday mornings. She stood in the back. She listened. She liked what she heard. As she listened to the lessons that we prepared for the children, God touched her heart. And Trini gave her heart to Jesus.

The family had a combined flower shop and pet shop. The church on the main “plaza” purchased more than \$300 of flowers from Trini every month for the altar. When they found out that Trini was meeting with the evangelicals, her flowers were no longer good enough. And Trini lost a large portion of the family’s monthly income.

To be ostracized. To be marginalized. To be rejected and isolated because of your faith is also persecution.

We do not know the circumstances that the believers faced in Thessalonica. But... we know that they loved each other during difficult days until they were weary. And then? Well, they kept on loving one another.

Getting through those rough times was toil. They stood up against persecution until they were weary. But they kept on loving each other.

Do we have an example of this kind of love? Of course we do.

Aren't you glad Jesus didn't stop loving us when He was tired. His trial lasted through the night. He didn't quit in the morning because He was tired. They beat Him. They whipped him. He didn't stop loving us because of the pain. He had not slept. Loss of blood made Him weak. He was so weary He could not carry the Cross to Calvary. The soldiers enlisted Simon of Cyrene to bear the cross.

### **He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels**

*They bound the hands of Jesus in the garden where he prayed.  
They led him through the street in shame  
They spat upon the Savior so pure and free from sin  
They said crucify him he's to blame*

*He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set him free  
He could have called ten thousand angels but he died alone for you and me*

Example: When I think of this kind of love, I think of my son, Nathan. Aubrey is a nurse. She works 12-hour shifts. When Abigail was born, she would not sleep. She would only sleep if she was held. So while Aubrey slept in preparation for a 12-hour shift, Nathan stretched out on the couch with tiny Abigail and cradled her in his arm. Nathan had some long days at work. But love ensured that his wife slept. Love ensured that his daughter slept.

Love is greater than sleepless nights. Love is greater than inconvenience. Love is greater than discomfort. Love is greater than personal loss. Love is greater than our schedules or our plans.

Some kinds words were directed to us last week. They indicate that we find ourselves in pretty good shape.

What do I want CBC to look like?

**1 Thes 4:9,10 <sup>9</sup> Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; <sup>10</sup> for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more...**

### **3. Their Steadfastness in Hope**

One more time, Paul uses the same word order. We would feel much more comfortable reading "Your hope is steadfast". But then, hope would be the focus. No. Paul commends the Thessalonians for their "steadfastness".

Steadfastness – Stong's 5281 hupomone

Cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy: - enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting)

They endured persecution cheerfully. They endured patiently. In the face of hard times, the Thessalonians kept on keepin' on.

No doubt, their “work of faith” and their “labor of love” was a major reason for their steadfastness. They stood together – and they stood strong. They endured together - and they endured long. Together, they looked to one thing – hope. Together they look to one Person – Jesus.

How can we illustrate “steadfastness”? Think of the pioneers who settled the wild, wild West. Try to imagine leaving the Mid-West in a Conestoga wagon. The Conestoga wagon carried up to 6 tons and could travel up to 15 miles per day. When the pioneers set out, everything that they owned was in that wagon.

Have you ever driven across Missouri? Missouri isn’t too bad if you are looking for a scenic drive.

Have you ever driven through Nebraska? Nebraska is dreadfully boring at 65mph. Can you imagine crossing Nebraska in a Conestoga wagon? You might make 15 miles on a good day. Day after day – nothing but grass and prairie as far as you could see. What kept them going? “Steadfastness”. They had set out with a goal in mind. They had a destination waiting for them somewhere over the horizon. A piece of land and a dream of a new life. They faced rain, wind, cold. Day after day, they knocked off, at most, 15 miles. But they kept going – spurred on by their dream – their hope – their goal.

Likewise, the Thessalonians had something that kept them going. It was their hope. And where did they place their hope?

***1 Thessalonians 1:3(NASB) <sup>3</sup> 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,***

After Trini gave her heart to the Lord, she asked to be baptized. In Spain, that’s it! Some people will look the other way if you want to hang out with the Protestants – “evangélicos. But if you renounce your Catholic baptism as a child – if you renounce your membership in the Roman Catholic church – then you have gone too far.

Trini asked me to preach at her baptism. I was honored. I wanted to present a message that would encourage her in the hard days that she would face. In Spain, we would often ask someone to choose a special verse and presents that verse to the believer at the baptism. It was a verse that would always help the believer to remember that day -- the day you publically proclaimed your faith in Jesus – the day that you obeyed the Lord in baptism.

For Trini, I chose .....

***Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”***

This verse talks about “steadfastness”. When the believers in Thessalonica faced hard times, they proved their faith with good works. When opposition arose, they loved until they were weary. Just like the pioneers crossing the plains, they kept on because something was set before them. For the Christian, someone is set before us.

So, how do we remain steadfast in our hope?

What did the pioneers do? They loaded up their wagons and headed out in wagon trains. No one did it alone. Safety was a factor. You would be safer in a group. Plus, someone would be there to help when a spoke in the wagon wheel broke. Someone would be there to help when the wagon got stuck in mud.

Well, Scripture agrees with this thinking. We can't do it alone.

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NASB) <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NASB) <sup>14</sup> We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

Do you ever get fainted-hearted? Fainthearted people aren't very steadfast. Do you ever get weary? We need one another. We all need a word of encouragement.

*Hebrews 3:13 (NASB) <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

*Hebrews 10:25 (NASB) <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

We remain steadfast in our hope by encouraging each to be steadfast. We need each because (1) life throws unexpected curve balls. We need each other because (2) we live in a culture that is hostile to Christianity.

Think about the teen who is mocked because he or she stands for sexual purity. What about the Christian who is encouraged to use dishonest business practices at work because profit is more important than integrity? A student has a test during 4<sup>th</sup> period. What does a Christian teen do when pressured to look at the answers that someone copied down from the same test during 2<sup>nd</sup> period? The Christian teens goes off to university. There everything they have learned is challenged and discredited. University age is when a lot of teens drop out of church. University age is when most teens forsake their faith. We need each other if we are going to remain steadfast in our hope in the Lord Jesus.

I look forward to 10:00am every Sunday morning. I can't comprehend the Christian who does not want to be with God's people on Sunday morning. Monday through Friday I deal with hassles. I deal with complaints. I deal with profanity. I deal with people who are rude and ungrateful. I get tired.

I will ask the question again, "What do I want CBC to look like?" My answer – I want CBC to be a refuge. I need a refuge. I need a place where I feel safe – accepted – loved – encouraged. Whatever happens from Monday to Friday, on Sunday we have a refuge. Together, we can encourage one another to be steadfast. Together, we keep our eyes on Jesus and our hope in Jesus.

What do you think? What do you want CBC to look like 5 years from now? 10 years from now?

Conclusion:

I will tell a story to wrap this up. Quite a few years ago, Joyce had a friend who was going to undergo surgery for cancer. She is a divorced, mother of 2 teens. They attended what we would call a mega-church.

I thought, "I will stop by for a few minutes and pray with her before the surgery and be on my way". I met our friend, chatted with the teens, and we prayed. I was the only one there. I thought, "These kids can't sit here by themselves while their mother is in surgery. I'll stay until one of the pastors comes". None came. So I thought, "Well... I can't leave them here by themselves. I'll stay until some members of the church arrive". None arrived.

I soon realized that my plans for the day were no longer important. They were cancelled. What mattered was that 2 teens knew that someone cared - that someone would be with them all day until Mom came out of surgery and they received a report from the surgeon. So, I stayed. All day.

Yes – the big church probably has better music – bigger sound system – flashing lights – smoke. The big church has wonderful facilities – great recognition in the community. But if you have all this stuff and do not have love, what good does it do ?

The size is really not the issue. Jesus said, “I will build My Church...”. So I leave the numbers of people and where those people go to church up to Him.

Here is the issue (for me).... I want to be part of a congregation that has faith that works. I want to find acceptance in a congregation whose love never stops. I want to find refuge in a church that longs to see Jesus and helps me to be unwavering in that hope.