

What are the Signs of a Healthy Church?

Intro:

1. The Lord said, "You will know my disciples by their fruit." (Jn 15:4-8)
2. Faith & love are fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).
3. Paul's prayer in I Thess 3:9-13 was that their faith & love might grow. This was an answer to that prayer!
4. The Thessalonian Church was becoming a healthy church. What can we learn from them to make our church a healthy one?

II Thessalonians 1:3-5

I. v3 - Make Sure Your Faith is Growing

- A. Faith begins as an acceptance of testimony. Heb 11:1 - Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
 1. ILL: A will might come with certain conditions.
 - a. If you care for Aunt Suzy you will receive all of your uncle's property.
 - b. So - you start providing for Aunt Suzy's needs & the property becomes yours.
 2. You submit to the authority of the Lord over you & you receive eternal life in heaven.
- B. Faith matures as trust in Jesus.
 1. Faith goes from believing what's in a book to trusting a person.
 2. Peter said, Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (I Pet 5:7)

II. v3 - Make Sure Your Love is Growing

- A. Biblical love starts out as a duty.
 1. Meaning of the word. The common element = what is the expectation for giving?
 - a. **Love # 1** (ἔρω) = I give to receive satisfaction or pleasure or reward; "I love hamburgers".
 - b. **Love # 2** (στέργω) = I give because of my marriage relationship; "I love my wife because she's my wife".
 - c. **Love # 3** (φιλέω) = I give because of the relationship & mutual benefit; "I love my friend Bill".
 - d. **Love # 4** (ἀγαπάω) = I give because there's a need to fulfill; "I want to give to help the starving Christians in Darfur".
 2. Love is given to satisfy a need because the need is there, not to get a reward!
 3. This is love that can be commanded as an expression of gratitude to the Lord.
 - a. **Matt 5:44 - But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**
 - b. **Matt 25:40 - The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'**
- B. Love matures by becoming a joy.
 1. ILL: **Nick Sklyros, a Greek short order cook making \$56.12 a week gave 3/4 of his money to the needy in the slums & enjoyed doing it!**
 2. Love gives life purpose & satisfaction.
 3. Everyone in the Thessalonian church grew in their love. What a church!

III. v4 - Make Sure Your Endurance Overcomes Your Persecution

- A. This was not just passively enduring trials, but using them to strengthen their faith.
1. There are two ways to view tragedy: blame God or depend on Him for spiritual strength.
 2. ILL: "Lord don't move that mountain, but give me strength to climb it!"

Lord I Don't Bother Nobody
I Try To Treat Everybody The Same
But Every time, I Turn My Back
They Scandalize My Name.

Now When My Folks Would Slay Me
These Things They Will Try To Do
But Lord, Don't Touch Em
But Within Their Heart
Make Em Give Their Life To You.

Now Lord Don't Move My Mountain
But Give Me The Strength To Climb it
And Lord, Don't Take Away My Stumbling Blocks
But Lead Me All Around it.

3. Many who have lost a loved one ask God for strength & come out of the trial spiritually mature.
- B. v4 - Those of you who successfully endure trials become examples to other Christians.

IV. v5 - The Results of Developing These Character Traits in Your Church

- A. They are evidence of a transformed Christian life.
- B. v5 - They are evidence of your worthiness of the kingdom of God.
1. This is not trying to work your way to heaven - you are saved by His grace, not your work! (Eph 2:8-9)
 2. You must show evidence of a redeemed life. Jam 2:26 - As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
 3. You were created for good works, not in producing good works to get into heaven. Eph 2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- C. v5 - They are evidence that God's judgment is right.
1. A judgment will happen! The Lord said, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done." - Matt 16:27.
 - a. Some say Christians will not have a judgment because of Jn 3:18 - Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.
 - b. But v21 says deeds will be shown.
 2. Maybe this is the answer: The judgment for a Christian is the evidence of a transformed life as the natural result of his conversion.
 - a. Many may say, "Lord, Lord" but really not be saved because they talk the talk but don't walk the walk! (Matt 7:21)
 - b. Many may go through the act of baptism but never rise to have new life. - Rom 6:4.

Is your conversion to the Lord really real?
Has your relationship with the Lord really made a difference?
The sign of a healthy church is spiritually healthy people!