

2 Thessalonians 1 Characteristics of a Model Church

Introduction: When I got to Horizon in San Diego in 1983 it seems to me like the perfect church. It's still unclear, but it may have gone downhill from the moment I started attending. Honestly, we're probably all aware by now that the perfect church doesn't exist. Still the Bible does give us an idea of what we should shoot for – things we can do to make our own church better. As churches go, the one in Thessalonica was pretty good, so this chapter gives us a number of characteristics (I counted 14) that a model church ought to have. **A Model Church:**

1. Is in Christ

- We live in a diverse nation in an even more diverse world.
- Pluralism at many levels is simply a fact of life.
- As Christians, we need to treat all people with love and respect.
- This does not mean, however, that we think all beliefs, even religious ones, are equally true.
- Unwavering belief in the unique and exclusive claims of Jesus Christ is what makes a church a truly Christian church. Accept no substitutes.

2. Experiences God's Grace

- Grace is "God's Riches At Christ's Expense".
- It is God's unmerited favor which He freely grants to all who receive by faith Jesus Christ's substitutionary work for them on the cross.
- God gives to us humans the opposite of what we deserve: blessing instead of judgment.
- This is the grace of God.

3. Enjoys God's Peace

- Wishing someone God's peace, or shalom was and is the traditional Jewish form of greeting.
- Shalom implies more than the cessation of hostilities or peace as opposed to war.
- The Complete Word Study Dictionary explains it as:
 - harmony, peace of mind, tranquility, wholeness, soundness, hence health; well-being, prosperity and every kind of good.

4. Is Thankful to God

- In this case it is Paul, not the church, who is giving thanks.
- Still, just as Paul expresses an obligation to give thanks for the Thessalonians, the Bible is clear as to the essential role of thanksgiving in our lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:18(NKJV) **in everything give thanks;** for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Ephesians 5:3-4(NKJV) But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, **but rather giving of thanks.**

Ephesians 5:20(NKJV) **giving thanks always for all things** to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5. Is Growing in Faith

- A growing faith is associated with difficulties.
 - See **James 1:2-4**

James 1:2-4(ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- **George Müller** was a pastor used by God to provide for thousands of orphans and numerous missionaries. He said:

“To learn strong faith is to endure great trials. I have learned my faith by standing firm amid severe testings.”

5. Is Growing in Faith

- One of the men George Muller supported was another great man of faith, James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. He said:

“I have found that there are three stages in every great work of God: first, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done.”

6. Is Abounding in Love

- In **1 Thessalonians 3:12** Paul prayed for this abounding love.

1 Thessalonians 3:12(NKJV) And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you,

- He now perceives the answer to his prayer.
- Notice that **every one** of the Thessalonian Christians was expressing this abounding love toward others.
- See also **1 John 4:12**

1 John 4:12(NKJV) No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

7. Is Patient in Troubles

- We’ve touched on this already regarding faith.
 - See also **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

2 Corinthians 4:16-18(NKJV) Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

- Warren Wiersbe puts it like this:

“If we rebel and fight our circumstances, then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials that He might build character into our lives. He can grow a mushroom overnight, but it takes many years—and many storms—to build a mighty oak.”

8. Is Willing to Suffer Unjustly for Christ

- Perhaps the least popular of the beatitudes is found in **Matthew 5:11-12**.

Matthew 5:11-12(NKJV) “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- The early church father Tertullian said:

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

- Finally, listen to Peter in **1 Peter 4:14-16**.

1 Peter 4:14-16(NKJV) If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

9. Understands the Reality of God’s Judgment

- We frequently associate “judgment” or “vengeance” with something automatically unfair or excessively cruel.
- To “judge someone” then seems just wrong.
- Perhaps this is because we do so often judge people or their actions unfairly.
- We may also confuse God with people who are genuinely hateful.
- But this can never be true of God.

9. Understands the Reality of God’s Judgment

- The word translated “judgment” in v.5 pertains to an opinion or a decision concerning anything, but especially having to do with justice or injustice, right or wrong.
- The word “**vengeance**” in v.8 is directly related to the words **righteous** and **just**.
- Divine vengeance is always completely without subjective bias or personal spite.

9. Understands the Reality of God's Judgment

- One of the best explanations of God's judgment or vengeance was given by C. S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, before the children first meet Aslan.
- Lewis rightly observed that a just and holy God is really a rather frightening idea.

"Is -- is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly.

"Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion -- THE Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he -- quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

"I'm longing to see him," said Peter, "even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point."

10. Understands the Reality of Hell

- The concept of hell has taken a severe beating in recent years.
- Many "new evangelicals" now see it as an outdated or unnecessary doctrine.
- Admittedly, no one especially likes the idea of hell, but the only proper question to ask is, "What does the Bible teach?"

10. Understands the Reality of Hell

- Some explain away hell by saying it refers to the annihilation of the lost – that they cease to exist.
- But annihilation would only take an instant and their punishment or destruction is said to be "everlasting" – just like "everlasting" life.

10. Understands the Reality of Hell

- Jesus repeatedly referred to hell as involving "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30). This indicates people are conscious.
- Revelation 22:10 speaks of the devil, the beast and the false prophet being "tormented day and night forever and ever." All the lost eventually join them in the lake of fire.

10. Understands the Reality of Hell

- The fire is not the worst part of hell. Daniel's friends were in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) and were completely at peace and unharmed for God was with them.

- The thing that makes hell intolerable is that its occupants are separated from God's presence.
- This comes out more clearly in some other translations: See 1 Thess 1:9 in ESV or NLT.

2 Thessalonians 1:9(ESV) They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

2 Thessalonians 1:9(NLT) They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power.

10. Understands the Reality of Hell

- Finally, let's hear a bit more of what Jesus has to say on the matter in Matthew 25:41 & 46.

Matthew 25:41(NKJV) "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

Matthew 25:46(NKJV) And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

11. Looks Forward to Christ's Return

- The return of Jesus Christ comes up in almost every book of the New Testament.
- It comes up multiple times here in 1 & 2 Thessalonians.
- The second to last verse in the Bible, the one before "Grace ... be with you all. Amen," reads as follows:
 - See **Revelation 22:20**

Revelation 22:20(NKJV) He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

12. Is Always in Prayer

- Again, Paul offers himself as an example of constant prayer in v.11.
- But he earlier expressed that constant prayer is what he desired for the church.
 - See **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

1 Thessalonians 5:17(NKJV) Pray without ceasing.

13. Is Alive with God's Power

- The Christian life simply cannot be successfully lived without that **unmistakable supernatural component** that is the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus said that His Father would give the Holy Spirit to anyone who would simply ask.

– See **Luke 11:11-13**.

Luke 11:11-13(NKJV) If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

- This power is what takes us from simple head knowledge of God to a living, victorious faith.

14. Brings Glory to the Name of Jesus Christ

- Paul also prayed for this in **Ephesians 3:20-21**.

Ephesians 3:20-21(NKJV) Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

- Peter states it well along with a warning at the end of his second letter.

– See **2 Peter 3:17-18**

2 Peter 3:17-18(NKJV) You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Review: A Model Church

So you will probably never find and we will probably never become the perfect church. But we do have quite a few characteristics that we can target. These should keep us busy for a long time to come. And remember that we'll never make any progress at all toward them with the Holy Spirit of God empowering us at the deepest level of our being.

Review: A Model Church:

1. Is in Christ
2. Experiences God's Grace
3. Enjoys God's Peace
4. Is Thankful to God
5. Is Growing in Faith
6. Is Abounding in Love
7. Is Patient in Troubles
8. Is Willing to Suffer Unjustly for Christ
9. Understands the Reality of God's Judgment
10. Understands the Reality of Hell
11. Looks Forward to Christ's Return
12. Is Always in Prayer
13. Is Alive with God's Power
14. Brings Glory to the Name of Jesus Christ