

Becoming God's Tri-athlete

Three Virtues that Prove You are a Believer

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (part 1 of 2)

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bibles and open them to 1 Thessalonians 1:3. Today I want you to see three virtues that prove you are a believer. If these three traits are in your life then you have strong concrete evidence that you have been born again.

Look with me at **1 Thessalonians 1:3**, "We continually remember before ourⁱ God and Fatherⁱⁱ your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." The Thessalonian church was a model. It was a group of believers that you would want to pattern yourself after. Look down at verse 7 where Paul tells them "you became a model to all the believers." That word "model" means example or pattern. Through this church and group of believers God is showing us what a vibrant, healthy, dynamic believer and church look like.

In verse 3 God gives us three things that described them and should describe us as His followers. These three things are crucial in living a life that crosses the finish line of life well.

Have you ever seen a triathlon? I watched Ironman Triathlon, located in Hawaii. You have athletes who are going to compete in one event with three parts. They will have to swim about two miles, bike over 100 miles, and then run a full marathon. In this triathlon you have the young, the old, men, and women and people from all different backgrounds. This triathlon is difficult, it's not easy, it's long, and it's hot. These athletes have been training for this event.

When it comes to living the Christian life well you will need to take serious God's triathlon. His triathlon involves a work produced by faith, a labor prompted by love, and an endurance inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to talk to you about those three things.

This is the first time that Paul uses what was to become one of his favorite trilogies – faith, love, and hope. Throughout God's Word you will find these three together, sometimes in different order, but they are significant to God's plan for your spiritual growth and impact.

- These are found together in Romans 5:1-5 where Paul shows how they sustain us in times of trouble.
- In Galatians 5:5-6 we see them connected in our waiting for the perfected state of righteousness that we will eventually receive.
- In Colossians 1:3-5 we see them as a significant part of what God uses to help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- In Ephesians 4:1-6 we see them as part of the basis for a mature Christian life.
- The best known use of the three is probably **1 Corinthians 13:13** which states, "These three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Even though these three virtues jump out at us in Scripture, the emphasis here in 1 Thessalonians is what they *produce* more than what they are. They produce active work, patient toil, and enduring constancy. These three virtues with their production have been called the three marks of effective Christianity. Let's examine each one and see what God says to us. This is a two part message, we will look at number one today and the other two next week.

1. A faith that energizes your work for the Lord.

Number one, you are to have a faith that energizes your work for the Lord. Notice in verse 3 God's Word points out their "work produced by faith." Some Bible translations describe this as "your work of faith" (NASB, KJV, HCSB), another describes it as "your work energized by faith" (Amp) and another one states it as "the things you have done

because of your faith” (NCV). Out of this phrase “work produced by faith” I want you to see three things.

A. A working faith is a practical demonstration of godly behavior.

Number one, a working faith is a practical demonstration of godly behavior. Now let’s look at this word “work.” Real faith is going to produce some kind of activity, deeds, behavior, and actions that honor God. The word “work” (ergon) focuses on the product of our efforts, the fruit that is being produced. It also carries the idea of a lifestyle. When someone looks at the behavior, actions, and deeds of your life they recognize that you do what you do because of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason you say what you say is because you want to honor Jesus. The reason you do what you do is because you want to honor God. It is a work produced by faith.

You have faith that God and His Word is true and because of that you *put into practice* what the Lord says. Later on in **1 Thessalonians 4:3** God’s Word says, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.” You have faith and trust in God. He says avoid sexual immorality. Your faith says, “Okay God, I’ll avoid it because it’s Your will for my life.” Your faith has just produced the work of sexual purity. It is a work produced by faith.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:16** God’s Word says, “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.” Because you have faith in whatever God says is true, your life will produce kindness to those around you. Your faith has produced the work of kindness. It is a work produced by faith.

Your life is a life of faith that produces all kinds of good works and behaviors that give evidence that you are a child of God. It is your “work” produced by faith. The reason you do these good works is because of your faith and trust in the Lord. You are not being kind, nice, and a blessing because you want them to be kind, nice, and a blessing back to you. You are kind and a blessing to others because of your faith in Christ. That is your motivation, your trust and relationship with Jesus drives you to behave in a way that honors God and honors people. It is your “work” produced by faith.

B. A working faith is produced by a trust in God.

A working faith is a practical demonstration of godly behavior. **Number two, a working faith is produced by a trust in God.** Notice they had a “faith” that produced work. Real faith generates and creates godly behavior and Christian works.

What kind of faith are we talking about? There are two ways to look at faith.

First of all, there is saving faith.ⁱⁱⁱ Saving faith is the faith you have when you become a believer. You place your faith in Christ for salvation. **Ephesians 2:8** refers to this when it says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...” Then in **Romans 5:1** we see this saving faith again when the Bible says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In order for anyone to become a believer and to have a home in heaven with Jesus, they have to place their faith and trust in Him as the Lord of their life. That is a faith that saves.

But now I need to talk to you about a **servicing faith**. A servicing faith is a faith that produces actions, works, behaviors, deeds, conduct, and performances that are in alignment with God’s Word and God’s will. Servicing faith is the kind of faith Paul was talking about when he said in Ephesians that we should “take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16). James talked about this in **James 2:17** when he said, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead.” John alludes to this servicing and working faith in **1 John 5:4** when he says, “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”

If faith was a coin then *saving faith* would be one side and *servicing faith* would be the other. You can’t separate the two. You can talk about them separately but you cannot separate them. They are connected.

Back to **1 Thessalonians 1:3** and this phrase “work produced by faith.” The side of faith that is being emphasized here is a *servicing faith*. Keep that in mind.

The bottom line is this: Your *saving faith* is going to show itself as a *servicing faith*. If you say you are a believer in Christ then there will be evidence in your behavior that you are. Your faith will produce works that glorify God and give evidence of your salvation. Faith always produces works. It always produces action.

C. A working faith is founded in a relationship with Jesus.

What have we seen so far? A working faith is a practical demonstration of godly behavior. A working faith is produced by a trust in God. **Third, a working faith is founded in a relationship with Jesus Christ.** At the end of **verse 3** there is a connecting phrase that relates to each quality listed. It’s the phrase, “... in our Lord Jesus Christ.” So Paul is talking about “your work produced by faith... in the Lord Jesus Christ.” If you are going to have a faith that prompts practical deeds for the glory of God then that faith needs to be in Jesus. You need to have a relationship with Him that is growing. You need to be a follower of Jesus, one who is growing and becoming like Christ. These works and actions that are produced by faith is not a faith in your abilities, your position in society, your intelligence, or your skills. It is work that is produced from an overflow of your relationship with Jesus.

Conclusion

As we wrap-up our time together we need to ask ourselves three questions:

- What practical demonstrations of godly behavior are produced in your life because of your faith and relationship with Jesus?
- Why do you do what you do? Does your faith in Christ drive or compel you to love others, to be kind, to do your best, and to avoid sin? Your motivation for godly behavior and good deeds should be your faith and relationship in Christ.
- Do you have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you surrendered your life and heart to Him? Is He your Lord and Master?

ⁱ Again, as with the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul calls God “our” Father. This is also a term of relationship. God is more than our maker or Creator. A Father cares for His children (Gal. 3:26).

ⁱⁱ Other translations word this as: “in the presence of our God and Father” (NASB, HCSB), “in the sight of God and our Father” (KJV), and “to our God and Father” (NLT). In other words, it is not only before Paul but before God Himself that their work, labor, and endurance has testified to the genuineness of their faith. Christians should do what they do under God’s eye. God has sight. He is not blind. He sees everything we do for Him (Gen. 16:13; 2 Cor. 16:9; Rom 3:20; Gal. 3:11; 2 Cor. 2:17; Heb. 4:13). Most people do not have the slightest idea that God sees them. They could care less. Those who love Him want to please Him because they know that He sees everything they do. God knows our sorrow and disappointment. He sees our need. He knows our desires. He sees our work, labor, and endurance for His glory.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Thessalonians 1:3 does not in any way contradict the clear teaching elsewhere that salvation is by faith alone, apart from human works. For example, in Romans 3:20-21 the Bible declares, “By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested.” Romans 3 goes on to say that sinners are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (vv. 24-25; cf. 4:4-5; 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9).