

A Perfect Church?

"...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ... also in every place your faith toward God is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything." 1 Thess. 1:7-8

The question has often been asked "Is there any such thing as the perfect church?" The answer that usually comes back is: "Well, if there is one, when I came to it, it would no longer be perfect."

This response accurately reflects the reality that there is indeed no such thing as a perfect church. As long as there are people around, there will never be a perfect church! Every local expression of the church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23) is a far cry from being "perfect", a condition that will only come about in a future Day at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It will be then that the Bride of Christ will have been made ready and "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright" (Rev. 19:7-8), the fulfillment of the work of Christ as the spirits of just men are made perfect.

The Churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia

When I think of a "perfect" church from Scripture, only two come to mind. The church at Smyrna in Rev. 2 was one church that did not receive a reprimand from the risen, glorified Lord. They were commended for their sacrificial life-style and their perseverance in the face of persecution. If they did have issues, you would not have known it based on their description. Their testimony was notable. Another church was the church at Philadelphia. They were eager to go through doors that God had opened, and even though they had little strength. They kept His Word, had not denied His Name, and were encouraged to hold fast. That sounds like a perfect church to me! Again, maybe they had some lingering issues, but if they did you would not have known it from what is recorded in the Word. Both would be fellowships that I would want to be associated with!

The Church of Thessalonica

The church at Thessalonica is another quality fellowship often referred to as a "model" church. Despite being shaken in spirit by a forged letter purporting that the Day of Christ had already come (2 Thess. 2:1-3), nevertheless they had an outstanding testimony (see the verses above). They were a well-grounded church. As a congregation, they exhibited the *evidence* of true faith by their "work of faith", "labor of love", and "patience of hope". It represented the assembly as a whole. Their "work" of faith, was the work of believing on Him whom God had sent (John 6:29), turning to God from idols (v. 9), the means of salvation. Their labor of love, was to "serve the living and true God", proving that salvation should always be followed by passionate service for Christ. Their patience of hope, was the means of their sanctification, the purifying effect of looking for His return. The whole church was characterized by these things. Seems like a perfect church to me!

They also showed in their testimony the *elements* of true faith in their salvation, namely, that their salvation came through the ministry of the Word, always needed for salvation (James 1:18); through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, also needed (John 3:5) and through the Word being given and received with much assurance that it will penetrate the heart and transform lives, also needed.

Finally, the church at Thessalonica showed both the *example* of true faith and the essence of true faith. Saved and unsaved alike took note of their changed lives to the point that Paul did not have to say a word about them – their actions spoke for themselves. They had turned to God from a life of idolatry, and were now serving the true God, while waiting for the Son from heaven. No wonder they were called a "model" church!

And your church?

Even though the Thessalonians *seemed* to have it all together, we know the sad condition of the heart, that is sinful, self-centered and in desperate need of constant correction. Quite possibly, these believers had issues too. That is why we need to be under the ministry of God's Word. So when you are tempted to resent that your fellowship falls far short of the standard, remember - there is no such thing as a perfect church.