

Exodus 36:6-7 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> ...So the people were restrained from bringing,  
<sup>7</sup> for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, 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, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction,

with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. <sup>9</sup> For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come

Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV)

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

I greet you with grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Risen Lord, and the Holy Spirit, who lives within us as believers, empowering us.

We are continuing our stewardship theme – “Maturing as stewards through Faith, Love and Hope” that theme is taken from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1 verse 3, where Paul says, “<sup>3</sup> **remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**” (1 Thessalonians 1:3 ESV) We are focusing on growing in Faith, Love and Hope. Today we speak of Love.

*LOVE – Characteristic of God & Believers*

Love is a characteristic of God, as it says in 1<sup>st</sup> John 4: 8 “<sup>8</sup> **...God is love.**” (1 John 4:8b ESV). How did God demonstrate that love? The next verse answers that question by saying, “<sup>9</sup> **In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him... he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**” (1 John 4:9 ESV) The Lord Jesus went to the cross being punished for sin, taking your place, which enables you to be forgiven. He now grants the gift of eternal life to all who believe, saved from the condemnation of the law. As new people in Christ, as believers, we are given love. John says, “<sup>19</sup> **We love because he first loved us.**” (1 John 4:19 ESV) In fact, the first quality mentioned in Galatians 5, the fruit that follows salvation, is *love*. It says “<sup>22</sup>**The fruit of the Spirit is love....**” (Galatians 5:22 ESV). This quality of love is part of our lives as believers. In fact, John, in his epistle, points to love as the evidence that we have been redeemed, saying, “<sup>14</sup> **We know that we have**

**passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”** (1 John 3:14 ESV) Love for the brothers is a characteristic of a believer. Love is the message of the Bible, the message of the Bible is love. In our lesson from Matthew, our Lord identifies that the love of God and the love for your neighbor is what the law and the prophets depend on, or, in other words, the entire Bible. This love is to abound more and more. However, and listen very carefully, the danger for us, as believers, is that our hearts can become hard. Our love can grow cold and we can wander away from the love of the Lord, living selfishly, and even reach a point of rejecting Jesus in our lives.

*LOVE – To Grow in our labor of love and not become hard and cold.*

This danger of hardened hearts and love growing cold, is given as a solemn warning in Hebrews 3, that says the following, **“<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”** (Hebrews 3:12-14 ESV)” We are to exhort or encourage each other in this walk of faith, this walk of love and this walk of hope resting in Jesus and that we are not found with an unbelieving heart that, hardened through sin. Love is to grow, and not become cold toward others, as our selfish sinful nature takes over and we mistreat each other and lack the desire to reach the lost. It is God’s word that changes us, empowers us, that we might live in love

In our lesson Paul uses the words ‘**labor of love**’ in describing these Thessalonian believers. The idea of labor denotes a persistent, diligent, arduous, effort to accomplish. This labor is out of our joy for Christ and is not a burden. That effort is out of who you are in Christ. Paul states in our lesson, **“<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,** (1 Thessalonians 1:4 ESV) We are chosen, redeemed, given a new life by Christ. It is out of our great love for Jesus that we are caring for those He loves. John in his epistle, proclaims this, saying, **“<sup>16</sup> By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.** 1 John 3:16 (ESV) See the commitment to love that comes from Christ. He continues, **“<sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”** 1 John 3:17-18 (ESV) They gave to each other, which involved their time, their talents and their treasure. This is the kind of commitment that Paul encourages in the Thessalonians. Paul proclaims that the gospel came with power in the Holy Spirit, Paul proclaims that they were imitators of Jesus and them and sites the following example, **“<sup>8</sup> the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia....<sup>9</sup> ...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”** (1 Thess 1:5-11 ESV) This is to be our testimony as well, as the Holy Spirit is working through us to others.

*LOVE – The example of the believers – Thessalonians, Macedonians and Colossians*

That happened to the Macedonia believers, as Paul says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, saying, “<sup>1</sup> **We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,** <sup>2</sup> **for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.** <sup>3</sup> **For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,** <sup>4</sup> **begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints —** <sup>5</sup> **and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”** (2 Corinthians 8:1-5 ESV) Out of their love for Jesus came care for others, bringing relief for the saints, those fellow believers. The love of Jesus in action in their lives. We see this in our lesson from Exodus. Moses in fact has to restrain the people, since they were giving too much, we have more than needed. This happened with the Colossian believers as well. Paul testified, “<sup>3</sup> **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,** <sup>4</sup> **since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,** <sup>5</sup> **because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.”** (Colossians 1:3-5 ESV) Living in love sharing Christ with the lost, as the word grows in our lives, so does our love.

*LOVE – as you reach others leading to repentance*

Paul spoke to Timothy about sharing in love, with gentleness that others might repent being captive by the devil, saying, “<sup>22</sup> **So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ...** <sup>24</sup> **And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,** <sup>25</sup> **correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,** <sup>26</sup> **and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”** 2 Timothy 2:22-26 (ESV) This is our calling, to grow through the word, that we would abound in this labor of love, resisting sin, that our hearts may not be hard or cold, but abounding in our labor of love, serving others and sharing the good news of the gift of salvation. May God grant this to us all.

In His name we pray, AMEN. May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.