

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

- A. **1 Thessalonians 3:1-10** . . . Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, [2] and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your **faith**, [3] so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. [4] For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. [5] For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your **faith**, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. [6] But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your **faith** and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, [7] for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your **faith**; [8] for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. [9] For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, [10] as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your **faith**?
- B. The prominent topic in these ten verses is the importance of faith in the Christian's life, and specifically, faith in God and His word for living a consistent, growing, and maturing godly life. The reason I say faith is the prominent topic is because Paul references the faith of the Thessalonian believers in five of the ten verses.
1. In **vs 2**, Paul says they sent Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian believers' **faith**.
 2. In **vs 5**, Paul says the second reason for sending Timothy was to find out if the Thessalonians' **faith** was still strong – given the probability that the tempter was tempting them for forsake their commitment to trust God and live a godly life.
 3. **Vs 6** tells us that Timothy returned to Paul and Silvanus with a good report concerning the Thessalonians' faith.
 4. In **vs 7** we learn that the Thessalonians' continued trust in God and obedience to His word brought comfort to Paul and Silvanus at a time when they were experiencing their own persecution.

5. And in **vs 10**, Paul confirms his longing to visit them and teach them what they haven't yet learned about trusting God and living according to His word.

C. Pray

II. The importance of faith in the Christian's life

A. [1] Therefore when we (*Paul, Silvanus, Timothy*) could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, [2] and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, [3a] so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions (*the afflictions that Paul and Silvanus were experiencing as a result of their evangelistic and church planting efforts in Berea – Acts 17:10-15*).

1. **1 Thessalonians 3:1** begins with the word “**Therefore**,” and this is important because it ties what Paul was writing at the end of chapter two about the Thessalonian believers' spiritual health and growth toward Christian maturity to what he is saying about them here in chapter three.
2. The words, “to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions,” appear at the end of **vs 2** and the beginning of **vs 3**.
 - a. What Paul is saying with this statement is that he was concerned that the resistance and persecution he, Silvanus, and Timothy were experiencing in Berea at the hands of the Jews would result in the Thessalonian believer's thinking that God could not be trusted to protect His people, or that Jesus wasn't able to protect those who represent Him.
 - b. The principle here is that any erosion or diminishing of faith **and** growth of distrust in a believer is a serious threat to their spiritual health and growth toward Christian maturity – and this is true of us as well.
 - c. Therefore, Paul sent Timothy to teach, disciple, and counsel these believers in ways that would build and strengthen their faith and encourage them to continue trusting God implicitly so they would continue living according to His word.
3. As I have pointed out many times before, faith in God and His word is essential for living the Christian life in the way God intends it to be lived. The truth is, wherever your faith in God ends, or wherever your distrust of God begins, your self-rule, your selfish solutions to life's needs, threats, and problems, and your sinful ways begin.

4. In other words, faith in God moves us away from self-rule, selfishness, and sin and toward God and godly living – whereas distrust of God moves us away from God and godly living and toward self-rule, selfishness, and sin.
- B. [3b] for you yourselves know that we have been destined (*set apart or preordained*) for this (*mistreatment*). [4] For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.
1. When Paul said he was set apart or preordained for this kind of mistreatment for preaching the gospel, it is probable he was referring to God’s words to Ananias when God sent him to pray for Paul to regain his sight – which he lost after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus.
 - a. This story is in **Acts 9:1-19**, and the specific part I am referring to is in **Acts 9:15-16**, where God says, “Go [to Saul], for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; [16] for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.”
 - b. And Paul did suffer for God and the gospel’s sake – and he describes his sufferings in **2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 6:2-10; 11:23-29**. For example, he said –
 - (1) “we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. . .”
 - (2) “in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults...by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death . . .”
 - (3) “[I’ve endured] imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. . .”
 2. Though Paul paid a heavy price for coming to faith in Christ and living a life of service to the cause of Christ, he was not the first or the last to suffer for God and the gospel’s sake. God’s prophets were mistreated and persecuted long before Paul was born, and Christ’s

followers have been ill-treated and persecuted ever since. Even God's word confirms that this is what Christians ought to expect. We read this in such places as –

- a. Jesus said in **Luke 6:22-23**, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.”
 - b. In **Acts 14:21-22** we read that after preaching the gospel in Derby (*DUHR bih*), Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”
 - c. And in **2 Timothy 3:12** Paul told Timothy that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
3. What does this mean for us? Will we be harassed, mistreated, or persecuted? I don't know, but it is currently reported by those who keep track that the mistreatment and persecution of Christians, worldwide, is greater than it has been since records have been kept.
 - a. In our own country, it is considered good or even Christian to openly support homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and immoral leaders outside and inside the church.
 - b. In fact, to stand for God, God's word, and truth while standing against the things I just listed is considered by many in the world and some in the church to be an evil that deserves some form of public rebuke, loss of position, or other punishment.
 4. So will we, here in the US, be harassed, mistreated, or persecuted? It is highly likely, and in some places it is already happening.
 5. However, as to whether you will be persecuted for righteousness sake depends on whether you stand for yourself or God when the harassment, mistreatment, and persecution closes in on you.
- C. [5] For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to **find out about your faith**, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.
1. Paul was concerned that the devil's temptations might have enticed the Thessalonian believers to hide or abandon their faith in order to stop the persecution.
 2. **Remember**, any erosion or diminishing of faith in God opens the door to distrust, and that is a serious threat to your spiritual health

and continued growth toward Christian maturity. The reality is, wherever your faith in God ends, or wherever your distrust of God begins – at that very place self-rule, selfish solutions to life's needs, threats and problems, and sinful ways begin.

3. It is probable you are not currently experiencing persecution for your faith, which means Satan is not enticing you to hide your Christianity or abandon God in order to stop the persecution. However, this does not mean he isn't tempting you to turn on God when suffering in ways that have nothing to do with persecution.
 - a. For example, have you murmured against, complained, accused, or even been angry at God for not giving you some good that others have, or for not preventing something bad from happening to you, or for not healing you as quickly or in the way you want?
 - b. If you have, this is due to an erosion of your faith and the growth of distrust toward God – which is encouraged by the devil's temptations which come to you in the midst of your sorrow and suffering.
4. Standing firm in your faith and growing in faith requires resisting the devil's temptations to turn from trust of God to distrust, and from being confident you are safe in God's hands to thinking God isn't doing enough, and therefore you must take matters into your own hands and deal with your situation your own way.

D. [6] But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your **faith and love**, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, [7] for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; [8] for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

1. I want to focus our attention on the three words, **faith and love**, and I want you to notice the order in which they appear. These same three words appear in this order four more times in scripture, and all in Paul's letters.
2. Though there may be other things that can be said about this combination of words, I want to focus on the fact that to consistently love as we ought requires obedience to God's word, and complete trust God's goodness, His provision, and His protection.
3. In other words, there can be no real love, no godly love, no lasting love without the kind of faith in God that trusts Him to be greater,

- more powerful, and therefore the safest, most secure place you can be when in spite of loving as you ought you are being mistreated, taken advantage of, treated unkindly, assaulted with hurtful words and abusive speech, unjustly criticized, and unfairly condemned.
4. Now admittedly, loving your enemy is hard. But I submit to you that it is even harder to continually love someone as you ought, who is either near or dear to you. And this is especially true when they repeatedly fail to love you as they ought.
 5. One of the reasons this is harder is because you expect more from them because of the nature of the relationship. For example,
 - a. If it is your child, you expect more because of what you are doing for the child.
 - b. If it is your teenager, you expect more because of what you are putting up with from them.
 - c. If it is your spouse, you expect more because they chose you and often say they love you – even though they aren't loving you as they ought.
 - d. And if it is a co-worker you expect more because they are supposed to be mature adults.
 6. These unfulfilled expectations along with the devil's temptations and our hurt feelings often motivates us to return some form of evil or ill-will or hurtful words or distance when those nearest or dearest don't love us as they ought.
 7. Without question, loving as we ought is personally costly – which is why loving God's way requires faith in God! I think about it this way. When it comes to love, and especially when it comes to loving those nearest and dearest, I am like David going up against Goliath.
 - a. In this case, Goliath represents the pain and suffering of not being loved in ways I want to be loved or ought to be loved.
 - b. Given the size of Goliath in comparison to me, the likelihood of being hurt is real, and the pain inflicted will hurt a great deal.
 - c. Therefore, if I am to continue loving – rather than running away or returning hurt for hurt and evil for evil, I must trust that I am loved enough by God and safe enough in His hands to be able to endure Goliath's onslaughts and be okay.
 8. In other words, just as God was David's protector and security when facing his Goliath, so God will be my protector and security when facing my Goliaths – if I will trust Him, and in trusting Him remain faithful to loving and living according to His will and word. Therefore, faith in God must precede love if we are to love as we ought.

- E. For me, **1 Peter 2:18-23** provides the most realistic, practical example of how faith in God can produce in me a godly response when those I am loving mistreat me.
- F. **1 Peter 2:18-23**, “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. [19] For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. [20] For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. [21] For you have been called for this purpose (*that is, to do what is right/loving even though it costs you dearly*), since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, [22] who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; [23] and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

III. Conclusion

- A. Who do you look to for protection or solace or security when you are not receiving the love you want or deserve from those nearest or dearest to you? If you will look to God and trust Him to take care of you and to meet your need for love regardless of how those who ought to love you are treating you, then you will find that it isn't very hard to continue loving as you ought.
- B. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a [4] Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, [5] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, [6] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [7] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never fails.