

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 3:7-13** . . . for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through (*or on account of*) 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? [11] Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; [12] and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; [13] so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

B. Last week we focused on the importance of faith in the Christian life – faith for remaining godly in the face of persecution, and faith for loving as we ought – and especially when the one we are loving isn’t loving us as they ought. Today, our focus will be on two things that are related and important for living a godly life.

1. **First**, we will look at the importance of standing firm so as to persevere in living godly and loving others in spite of the circumstances.
2. **Second**, we will look at **why** responding to God’s directing and urging you to increase and abound in love for others leads to the kind of thinking, desires, beliefs, values that will enable you to stand before God, blameless and holy, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Pray

II. The importance of standing firm in the Christian’s life.

A. [7] for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through (*or on account of*) your faith.

1. Faith in the existence of God, in the perfect and eternal goodness of God, in the provision and protection of God, in the will of God, and in the word of God is the foundation of the Christian life – beginning with repentance and faith in Jesus for eternal salvation.

to living a godly life, and culminating in spending eternity with God in His new heavens and new earth.

2. Peter confirms the priority of faith in describing the progressive growth or the order in which we build a godly life. We read this in **2 Peter 1:5-7**, “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your **faith** supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, [6] and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, [7] and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.”
3. And the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that faith is essential for pleasing God: **Hebrews 11:6**, “[For] without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is (*exists*) and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”
4. It is the place and importance of faith to Christian living that Paul is speaking of in his next statement.

B. [8] for now we really live, **if you stand firm in the Lord.**

1. Though Paul was committed to the work of evangelism, his goal was to establish churches made up of Christians who were growing toward spiritual maturity and standing firm in their trust of God and in their commitment to living a godly life.
2. Therefore, Paul says that he, Silvanus, and Timothy really live **IF** these believers stand firm in the Lord, that is, **IF** they remain immovable or fixed in their faith, love, and godly living.
 - a. Notice, Paul’s **IF** is a **conditional IF**. Why? Because **standing firm** in submission and obedience to the Lord, or standing firm in the faith, or standing firm in loving others, or standing firm in godly living, or standing firm in what God’s word says about how to live the Christian life is **essential to** or the **condition for** living a life that concludes with standing before God at the return of Christ and being labeled blameless and holy.
 - b. The reality is, not much of worth is gained for God and no reward is gained for the pastor or elders of a church if the believers do not stand firm and unmovable in their trust of God, in their love of others, and in their commitment to godly living.
3. For example, in **1 Corinthians 3:5-15**, Paul points out that those who evangelize, teach, and preach are God’s fellow workers, while those who respond are God’s field, God’s building. If those in leadership teach or lead in ways that fail to encourage or exhort

those listening to deal decisively with sin, put on Christ-likeness, and grow to spiritual maturity, then though these leaders might be saved, they will not receive a reward for how and where they led those under them. Why? Because what they taught and where they led the people was unworthy of any reward.

4. In his letters, Paul applied the words “**stand firm**” in some very practical ways – and he also showed the cost of failing to stand firm. We will look at five such examples.
 - a. In expectation of Christ’s return, Paul exhorts us to be prepared by remaining alert, **standing firm** in the faith, acting like men (*rather than being held back by fear*), and being strong. Paul concludes this exhortation with “Let all that you do be done in love” (**1 Corinthians 16:13-14**). Being on the alert against the attacks of the devil, the allurements of the world, and the waywardness of our old nature is only helpful if we stand firm when tempted to do what we know is wrong.
 - b. In talking about the freedom we have in Christ, Paul exhorts us to keep **standing firm** in our freedom so as not to be held back by religious practices that get in the way of pursuing, knowing, and loving God, and living a godly life (**Galatians 5:1-2**). Not standing firm in our freedom can lead to engaging in religious practices that have the look of godliness but have no effect on the way we think, what we value, and how we love and live.
 - c. In **Ephesians 6:10-17**, we are exhorted to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. And we do this by putting on the full armor of God, so that we can **stand firm** against the schemes of the devil, and against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Twice more we are exhorted to **stand firm** in our God-provided armor so as not to be moved by whatever the devil or the world throws at us. Failure to put on the full armor of God and **stand firm** against the enemy’s onslaughts will result in unnecessary defeat at the hands of the enemy.
 - d. In **Philippians 1:27-28**, we are exhorted – as a church – to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, **standing firm** in one spirit so that with one mind we strive together for the faith of the gospel. Failure to stand firm together will leave the weaker ones among us vulnerable to discouragement, attacks of the enemy, and the pressures and allurements of the world.

- e. Finally, in **2 Thessalonians 2:13-15**, we are told that God has chosen us for salvation through (*or by means of*) sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. Therefore, we are to **stand firm and hold on to** the teachings of scripture and the religious and spiritual practices of the godly ones who are teaching and leading us. This is challenging, because all around us values, beliefs, principles, and behaviors are being promoted that are contrary to God's word. Therefore, if we don't stand firm and hold tightly to the truth of God's word, we will be swayed and overcome by the falsehoods promoted by our culture and by those who call themselves Christians.
5. As I said, "**standing firm**" means being immovable or remaining fixed in your commitment to trusting God, living according to God's word, and loving as you ought. This is **essential** to living a life that concludes with being labeled blameless and holy when standing before God at the return of Christ.

III. The importance of loving as we ought for living a godly life.

- A. [12] and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people (*just as we also do for you*) [13] so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.
- B. Paul says something similar in **Philippians 1:9-10**, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge (*as opposed to false or supposed knowledge*) and all discernment (*the use of the intellect to discern truth from error, right from wrong, God's ways from the ways of the world and the devil*) [10] so that you may approve (*accurately judge and partake of*) the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless **until** the day of Christ."
 1. Real knowledge and all discernment are qualities needed to love as we ought, and you cannot gain real knowledge and all discernment without removing selfishness and sin, because they blind you to real knowledge and discernment. But you must replace the blinders with godliness and love – for it is godliness and love that enables you to think honestly, rightly, and rationally which in turn enables you to approve the things that are excellent.
- C. In other words, God enables, empowers, and directs us to increase and abound in love for others, and when we respond as God intends, it

transforms us and the way we live to the degree that at the coming of our Lord Jesus we are able to stand before God, blameless and holy.

1. Which raises the question, what is the link between love and holiness, or love and living a godly life here and now?
 2. It is the same as the link between faith and love. Just as you **will not** love as you ought without trusting God to be your provider, protector, and primary source of security, so you **cannot** love as you ought without becoming holy in thought, word, and deed.
 3. Or to say it another way, a sincere pursuit of loving as you ought takes you through a process of spiritual growth that results in becoming godly in all the ways God wants you to be holy.
 4. For example, you **cannot** love as you ought without becoming painfully honest with yourself about yourself, and becoming humble, selfless, kind, just, compassionate, patient, merciful, forgiving, long-suffering, self-controlled, and graciously and patiently honest with others.
 - a. To gain such qualities as these requires dying to pride, self-importance, selfishness, and self-rule, along with putting out of your life any thoughts, desires, beliefs, values, words, or deeds that stand in the way of becoming the godly person you must be to love as you ought.
 - b. In other words, any pursuit of love that has the goal of loving as you ought requires making the kind of inward and outward changes that result in becoming holy in the ways God wants you to be holy.
- D. It is true, the word of God does not say this as clearly as I just said it. However, there are scriptures that, in my opinion, clearly infer or give support to the truth that getting to the place of loving as we ought necessitates going through a transforming process that changes us so much it results in being seen by God as blameless and holy at Christ's return. For example:
1. **Romans 13:8-10**, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [9] For this, 'you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' [10] (*And here is the reason love fulfills the law*) **Love does no wrong to a neighbor**; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

- a. Think carefully and deeply about what thinking, values, beliefs, passions, emotions, and habits must be changed in the one who wants to commit adultery, who wants to murder, who wants to steal, who does covet – and you will begin to see why loving as we ought requires profound and transforming changes.
2. **1 John 4:7-8**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God (*God is the one who came up with the idea and ideal of love, and He made us in a way that we want to be loved.*); and everyone who loves is born of God (*is God’s child*) and knows God (*well enough to know what God is like and why He is like that*). [8] The one who does not love (*who chooses a response other than love in a given situation or as a way of life*) does not know God (*what He is like and why He is like that*), for God is love.”
3. **1 John 4:12**, “No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us (*loving as we ought is proof that God is in us even though we cannot see Him. Note Psalm 15 and John 14:23 to see what kind of character, thinking, believing, valuing, and living we must have to have God abide in us.*) and His love is perfected in us.
 - a. **Psalm 15:1-5**, “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? [2] He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. [3] He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; [4] in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; he swears to his own hurt and does not change; [5] he does not put out his money at interest, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.”
 - b. **John 14:23**, Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”
4. **1 John 4:16-17**, “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in (*or dwells in or lives in*) love (*to dwell in love is equal to thinking and living according to the principles and practices of love so as to love as we ought*) abides in God, and God abides in him. [17] By this (*abiding in love and God abiding in us*), love is perfected with us (*that is, we continue to grow and mature in godly expressions of love so as to love more and more as God loves*), so that we may have

confidence (*that we will be seen by God as blameless and holy*) in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Just as loving as we ought requires faith in God's goodness, provision, and protection, so loving as we ought requires a pursuit of godliness that has the goal of being holy in all our behavior just as God is holy.
- B. Why? Because we cannot love as we ought while holding on to any amount of pride, selfishness, self-rule, distrust of God, or disregarding God's word.