

“Stand Firm in the Lord”

October 15, 2017

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

I. Introduction

According to [Acts 15:10-15](#), after Paul and his fellow workers were driven out of Thessalonica, they went to Berea where they preached the Gospel. But the troublemakers from Thessalonica followed them and stirred up trouble in Berea as well. Since they were targeting Paul, he left for Athens while Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea. But as we have seen in the first 2 chapters of Thessalonians, Paul had a pastor’s heart for those he left back in Thessalonica. He loved and cared for those who had come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. As we saw last week, he had been a mother to the church, a father to them, and a brother. He said that they would be his glory and his joy at the coming of Christ, at the appearance of the Lord Jesus when all believers will receive their rewards.

Since Paul had a real affection—a motherly love—for them, he was frustrated in not being able to return to them. He had been hindered by Satan. Paul had had to leave Thessalonica so quickly that there were some unfinished teachings and doctrines that he had not been able to teach them. He not only longed to return to continue their education, but he was concerned about the future of the believers there. He desired to comfort them—to help them stand firm in the Lord. Using Paul’s words from [1 Thessalonians 1:3](#), they weren’t just numbers; they were a “**labor of love.**” As we have already seen, such love—Christian love—seeks the welfare of another and is willing to jeopardize one’s own life for the person that is loved. It was this kind of love that we saw modeled in Las Vegas a couple of weeks ago when people covered others with their bodies to keep them from being shot. It was such a love that Paul had for the Thessalonians. But Paul just didn’t sit around and stew—he acted. In today’s Scripture, we see 3 things Paul did for the Christians in Thessalonica. First, he sent them a helper.

II. Paul's Actions of Love

A. He sent a helper. Paul wasn't only an evangelist; he was a pastor. He knew that winning the lost to Christ was just one part of the Great Commission. These new believers must be taught and established in the faith. So when he **"could stand it no longer,"** Paul chose to be left alone in Athens so that Timothy could return to Thessalonica—Paul sent a helper. Even though he faced his own trials all by himself, Paul was more concerned about his people's spiritual wellbeing in the midst of their trials than about himself. As a parent provides for loved children, Paul wanted to give of himself and his resources for his children in the Lord; as Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 12:15**, **"So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well."**

Timothy was the perfect one to send. First, Paul called him his **"brother,"** which Timothy was as a fellow believer. According to **1 Timothy 1:2**, Paul had led Timothy to faith in Christ. By faithfully working with Paul in his travels, Timothy had grown through the trials they had gone through together—**turn to Philippians 2:19-22**. Second, Paul referred to Timothy as **"God's fellow worker."** He worked with God because he, like Paul, faithfully preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ—**Philippians 2:13** says, **"It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."** As Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:6**, **"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."**

Timothy's task was two-fold: **"to strengthen and encourage you in your faith."** The Thessalonians were still young in their faith and were being tested by many trials. They needed help to grow in their spiritual maturity, their faith needed to be strengthened. Strong faith is a result of knowing all that God has revealed and has a firm foundation in sound doctrine. No faith can be strong without knowledge and understanding of the truth of God. This is why every Christian needs to read and study God's Word. Like everything else, if you're not going forward, you're going backward.

Second, he was to encourage them. He was to come alongside them and motivate them to live the doctrines they learned.

Paul knew that they faced trials and didn't want anyone to become unsettled or disturbed by the difficulties that came their way. Paul reminded them that all believers should expect trials and testings—Paul wrote that “we were destined for them.” Jesus said in [John 16:33](#), “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” [Philippians 1:29](#) says, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.” Persecution is not foreign to the believer; it is a normal part of the Christian life. To make sure that the Thessalonians got the point, Paul reminded them that “we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.”

Timothy's task was to establish a strong foundation for these believers and to encourage them in their faith. It is faith in God that keeps Christians from falling when the enemy attacks. Without faith in God, we are defeated—[1 John 5:4](#) says, “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”

When Paul sent Timothy, he didn't know how the Thessalonians' faith had stood through the trials, tribulations, and persecutions that had come their way. Paul's fear was that the “tempter, i.e. Satan, might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.” Like any parent sending their child off to college or off to being an adult in their own standing, Paul was concerned about the Thessalonians—would they stand firm?

B He wrote them a letter. [Acts 18:5](#) says that Timothy returned from Thessalonica and caught up with Paul at Corinth. Here Timothy gave him the good news that things were going well at Thessalonica. The phrase “brought us good news” is the exact equivalent of “*preaching the Good News of the Gospel.*” The report from Timothy was, to Paul, like hearing the Gospel. This led to the second thing Paul did for the Thessalonians, he wrote them a letter.

Timothy's report can be broken into four parts. First, he delivered the good news that their faith in God and Jesus Christ was genuine. Like the Parable of the Sower in [Matthew 13](#), their hearts had been the good soil that received the seed of the gospel and bore much fruit. Their faith was strong. Second, he told Paul the good news about their love—their Christian love—for God and others—love which is the clearest evidence that they were Christians—in [John 13:34-35](#) Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Their love was genuine. Third, Timothy reported that they “always have pleasant memories of” Paul. This was “good news” since many detractors were trying to sway the attitude that these new Christians had concerning Paul, but they continued to trust him. Finally, Timothy said that they longed see to him.

Timothy's report changed Paul's concern to delight. In the midst of all his distress and persecution in Athens and Corinth, Paul was encouraged about the true, saving faith of his spiritual children. Paul's response was to write them this letter.

C. Finally, he prayed for them. Paul recognized that his gratitude for the Thessalonians must primarily go to God, but he was unable to come up with the appropriate words, he wrote, “How can we thank God enough for you?” The working of God in their lives had made Paul grateful beyond expression—he was lost for words. Paul knew it was not enough to just teach them Bible truths, he must also support them in prayer. So, he prayed for them.

Paul prayed for three specific requests. First, he prayed that their faith would grow. Paul prayed that he might “see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” Turn to [1 Peter 2:1-3](#). Paul's plan was to return and teach them, i.e. to expand their knowledge of God through His truth. This would enlarge their faith in God and enable them to walk in greater obedience to God's will. Even though Paul didn't return to Thessalonica, he saw his prayers answered—several months later he would write in his second letter to them—in [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#) we read: “We ought always to thank

God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.” He prayed that their faith would grow.

Second, Paul prayed that “the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.” Times of suffering can be times of selfishness.

Persecuted people can become very self-centered and demanding. Some people build walls in times of trial and shut themselves off. Others build bridges and draw closer to the Lord and His people. This was Paul’s prayer for these believers. In [John 13:35](#) Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” But Paul didn’t just pray that they would love their fellow Christians; he prayed that their Christian love would “overflow for everyone else.” We love one another, but we must also love the lost and our enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 5:44](#) Jesus said, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Paul’s third request was that they “be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” Every person is made holy, i.e. set apart, and blameless when he or she becomes a child of God. But when Christ returns, He will reward His children for the works they have done ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)) after they became His children—turn to [1 Corinthians 3:10-15](#). It is our love for Jesus and the anticipation of His return of Jesus Christ that must motivate the believer to live a holy life. We must anticipate Christ’s return.

III. Conclusion

There are several things in this chapter which apply to us as well as to the Thessalonians. First, contrary to the Health and Wealth Gospel preachers—Joel Osteen comes to mind as an example, becoming a Christian doesn’t mean life will become smooth without any bumps in the road. Actually, being a Christian means there will be trials, tribulations, and persecutions—as we saw earlier, they are a normal part of the Christian life. Turn to [1 Peter 5:8-9](#). But God can use this to our good—

James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” If you allow the Holy Spirit to transform you, He can use the trials that come your way to grow your faith and make you a more mature Christian. Faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. God tries our faith, not to destroy it, but to develop it.

Paul’s prayer also teaches us how to pray not only for new believers, but for all believers. We should pray that their faith will mature, that their Christian love—agape love—will grow for fellow Christians and for the rest of the world, and that their character and conduct will be holy and blameless before God. We need to spend time in prayer for one another.

As we see in Paul’s concern, it is important to care for new Christians. Leading someone to Christ is not enough. We must help him or her grow in the Christian life and help him/her get established. If he is not established, i.e. anchored in the Rock, Jesus Christ, he will fall when the winds of persecution start to blow. If he cannot stand, he will never learn to walk.

Finally, although the return of Jesus Christ isn’t mentioned in many contemporary churches (but then neither are hell and sin) we must never forget that Jesus is coming back—in [Revelation 16:15](#) He said, “Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” Contrary to some false prophet’s claims, no one knows when Jesus will return—in [Mark 13:32](#) Jesus said, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” But Jesus said He would return, so it is fact. We need to live our lives with that expectation. In conclusion, listen to these words from Peter, [turn to 1 Peter 1:13-19](#). *Stand firm in the Lord: grow through persecution, pray for others, help others grow in the Lord, look forward to the return of your Lord and Savior.*

