

“A Church to be Proud Of”

January 7, 2018

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

I. Introduction

Happy 2018. Welcome to a new year and all the things that are ahead of us. It seems appropriate that with the beginning of a new year that we begin the study of a new book and since we finished First Thessalonians just before Advent, today we begin Second Thessalonians. Please turn to

[2 Thessalonians 1:1-4.](#)

As you may remember, the town of Thessalonica was a bustling seaport on the northwestern shore of the Aegean Sea across the sea from the country we now call Turkey. In Paul’s day it was home to around 225,000 people—most of whom were Greeks, but there were also many Romans and a strong Jewish minority. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had come to Thessalonica on Paul’s 2nd missionary journey. [Acts 17:1-10](#) records that Paul spent 3 Sabbaths “[explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead](#)” ([Acts 17:2-3](#)). Because of his preaching [Acts 17:4](#) says that “[some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.](#)” Because of the success of their outreach, persecution arose and Paul and his team had to flee the city. Eventually Paul and from the rest of the team split up, but after spending some time working in a variety of cities, they regrouped in Corinth.

Before Timothy caught up with Paul, he went back to Thessalonica and when he met Paul, [1 Thessalonians 3:6](#) says that he “[brought good news about their faith and love.](#)” But there were some issues that needed to be clarified or dealt with, so that led to Paul writing 1 Thessalonians around AD 51. It’s possible that Timothy and/or Silas had delivered the first letter, stayed there a short time, and returned to Paul in Corinth with more good news and some bad news.

The Christians in Thessalonica were grateful for Paul’s first letter, but it didn’t solve all their problems. In fact, the persecution had gotten worse and some believers thought that they were living in

the time of the Tribulation. Then a letter arrived in Thessalonica, claiming to be from Paul, saying that the Day of the Lord was actually present. Many in the church were confused and some were frightened by all this. To top it off, some believers decided that since the Lord's coming was near, they ought to quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for Him. This meant that the other members of the church had an extra burden to care for them. In response to these needs, Paul wrote his second letter several months after the first one.

II. A Church to be Proud of

A. The Greeting The greeting in this letter is identical to that in 1st Thessalonians with one exception. Here the reference is to “God *our* Father” which emphasized that God is the Father of all believers. Paul frequently wrote of believers being in Christ Jesus, but here he described Christians as being in “God *our* Father.” For those going through severe persecution, this was a reminder of God's care for them.

As he did in his first letter, Paul reminded his readers that “*grace and peace*” were from “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Once again by placing the Lord Jesus Christ alongside God the Father, Paul was affirming Christ's deity and full equality with the Father.

B. Reasons to be proud After greeting his friends, i.e. his brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul went straight to reasons for being proud of these baby Christians. In doing so, Paul was following his own admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “*In everything give thanks;*” he wrote, “*We ought always to thank God for you.*” “*Ought*” refers to a deep obligation, debt, or responsibility. Paul had no choice but “*always to thank God for*” the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians may not have considered themselves very spiritual as they suffered, but Paul detected that God was doing good things in and through them. Many times others can see the spiritual improvements before the individuals themselves can.

1. Growing faith What made Paul grateful or proud wasn't the size of the Thessalonians' congregation, or their budget or their popularity, the apostle praised God most of all because “*Your faith is growing more and more.*” This was Paul's first reason to be proud: their growing faith. In

1 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul wrote, “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” And his prayer was being answered!

A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. New believers—all believers—must expect their faith to be tried because this is how God proves whether or not their decision is genuine. In the Parable of the Soils in Matthew 13:20-21 Jesus said, “The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.” The Thessalonians’ faith had grown not only despite the persecution they were experiencing, but also because of it. Persecution destroys false faith and strengthens true faith. Turn to 1 Peter 1:6-7.

Faith like a muscle must be exercised to grow stronger. Tribulation and persecution are God’s ways to strengthen our faith. They drive believers to God—in Psalm 119:67 we read, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.” Contrary to some false teachers, suffering and persecution are part of God’s plan—1 Peter 4:19 says, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” Turn to the familiar verses in James, turn to James 1:2-4. An easy life can lead to a shallow faith. All the great men and women of faith found in Hebrews 11 suffered in one way or another or faced tremendous obstacles so that their faith could grow.

2. Increasing Love A second reason for which Paul was proud of the Thessalonians was “the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.” This is the second reason for pride in the Thessalonians: their increasing love. This is another answer to Paul’s previous prayer in First Thessalonians. Suffering can make a person selfish, but when suffering is mixed with grace and faith, it produces love—Galatians 5:6 says, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

This love isn’t the sentimental or emotional feeling, but is the sacrificial love, agape love, that marks true believers. 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.” Increasing faith in God and love for others are essential characteristics of true believers. To Paul’s joy, they were unmistakable in this church.

3. Evident perseverance Finally, Paul praised them for their evident perseverance as well as their faith “in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” Perseverance is not a resigned, stoic acceptance, but the patient, courageous enduring of trouble. It’s not a grim waiting but a joyful hoping. **Romans 5:3** says, “We know that suffering produces perseverance.” One doesn’t become patient and persevering by reading a book or listening to a lecture. One becomes patient through suffering.

Paul used several words to describe what the church was going through: “persecutions” means hostility or attacks from enemies of the gospel; “trials” or “afflictions” is suffering resulting from persecution. The Thessalonian Christians were not having an easy time, but Paul was thankful and proud that they refused to renounce their faith, let their love grow cold, or abandon their hope.

But their suffering wasn’t only helping them grow, what they experienced helped others to grow as well. God encourages us so that we may encourage others—**2 Corinthians 1:4** says, God “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” For this reason Paul boasted of them—their example of faith, love, and perseverance in the midst of troubles was a comfort to others that were experiencing the same kind of issues. The Thessalonians were proof that one can stand tall and grow in the midst of persecutions and trials.

III. Conclusion

In contrast to the self-centered thought found in so many churches today, the new Christians in Thessalonica had only a God-centered outlook. Instead of being consumed with personal happiness, fulfillment, comfort, success, or prosperity, they were living out Jesus’ command to “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (**Matthew 6:33**). Such a perspective enabled them to successfully endure

the inevitable persecution that comes to the faithful—1 Thessalonians 3:3 says, “No-one should be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.”

God never wastes suffering. The very troubles and afflictions which the world heaps on the believer become, under God, the means of making any believer what he or she ought to be. Suffering is not evidence that God has forsaken us, but is evidence that God is with us. If we trust God and yield to Him, then trials will produce patience and maturity in our lives. If we rebel and fight our circumstances, then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials that He might build character into our lives.

God doesn't evaluate a Christian or a church based on external features—1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us that “The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” A church to be proud of is a place where true Christians see their faith growing, their love for one another and for the lost increasing, and their perseverance and faith flourishing in the midst of persecution. Such a church will be a testimony to the world and to other churches.

There are some sufferings and troubles that we bring on ourselves—like not putting gas in our car or refusing to pay a bill or not obeying traffic laws. But there are sufferings and troubles that come from being a Christian, as James wrote, these we need to accept with joy. Don't let others tell you that you are failing as a Christian, sufferings and troubles are proof that God does love you; you can be sure that He will use them to help you become more Christ-like. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:16 & 19, “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name....19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” If you follow God's prescription, then you will be a Christian God can be proud of.