

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 30TH - 31ST, 2021 // BOOK OF 1 THESSALONIANS
SUFFERING AFFLICTION (1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5)

In the previous chapter, Paul explained how much he wanted to be with the Thessalonians during their time of trial (1 Thess. 2:17-18). Timothy had been sent to do two things:

1. To **"establish"** them in their faith- Timothy was there to help these young believers start their journey with Jesus on the right path. Good doctrine and worldview, habits & spiritual disciplines, and holy lifestyle.
2. To **"exhort"** them in their faith- to "encourage" literally means to impart courage to someone as they learned to live for Jesus. This was so they might not be "moved by these afflictions" (vs. 3).

Without a proper understanding of our faith (no establishing) and without proper courage to live out our faith (no encouragement), we're in great danger of being "moved" when it gets difficult to follow Jesus.

- Affliction that we face as a Christian comes often through persecution, but that word doesn't just refer to persecution.

Two Greek words were often used to translate the concept of suffering- "thilipsis" was used for such things as physical pain, emotional hardships, and suffering under temptation.

- The word "pasko" was used for such things as physical sufferings unrelated to persecution, suffering under temptation, and hardships in a general sense.
- These things can "move" us if we're not established and encouraged in our walk with Christ.

Affliction should never surprise us as a Christian.

- In fact, Paul and Silas warned these believers that they would go through suffering (vs. 4).
- Even though he'd warned these believers of the necessity of suffering, Paul was concerned that their faith might crumble under this affliction, so he sent Timothy to check on them and help them (vs. 5). Paul knew that the "tempter" (Satan) often exploits seasons of suffering.

Suffering is a reality you will endure as a follower of Jesus- through persecution, temptation, hardships, physical pain, and emotional trauma.

- Satan will try to "tempt" you and exploit your suffering as you endure it in an attempt to "move" you. But if you're established in your faith (sound doctrine, spiritual disciplines, Biblical worldview) **and** you're being encouraged in your faith (by another believer or church community), you can stand firm in the day of trouble.

STANDING FAST IN THE LORD (1 THESSALONIANS 3:6-10)

When Timothy returned from his visit to Thessalonica, he brought the good news that the believers there had faith and love, even in spite of what they'd gone through (vs. 6).

- John Calvin wrote that faith and love are, "concisely the sum total of godliness"- vibrant faith in Christ and authentic love for God and other people are the fruit that bear witness to our regeneration.

- "You always remember us kindly"- they hadn't believed the false rumors about Paul either.

Because of Timothy's good report of the Thessalonian's faith, Paul was comforted even in the midst of his, "distress and affliction" (vs. 7).

- There's something about community that enables us to continue when we feel like giving up. Our faith is strengthened and propped up when we see someone else staying faithful to Jesus while going through something similar to us.
- God has designed community to give us that strength.

Timothy's report that these believers were, "standing fast in the Lord" were like a shot of life to Paul.

- "How can I thank God enough for you and for all the joy I feel because of you?" (vs. 9).
- Even though the good report from Timothy was amazing, Paul wanted to see the face of this church family in Thessalonica- he was praying, "night and day" that this would happen.

Paul wanted to see them to, "supply what was lacking in their faith" (vs. 10).

- Even though these people had incredible faith in Christ and love for God, they weren't fully developed in their knowledge and understanding.
- Spiritual progress is always to be celebrated, but it's never to be considered complete.
- Until we see Jesus face to face, there's always more He wants to do in us and through us.

WHAT IS LACKING IN YOUR FAITH?

Sound doctrine: is that you need to grow in your understanding of Scripture and what it says about God and His ways? **Spiritual disciplines:** is it that you need to grow in your prayer life, Bible reading, giving, church participation, serving others, fasting, discipling and witnessing to others? **Biblical worldview:** is it that you need to learn to think like a follower of Jesus?

MAY THE LORD MAKE YOU INCREASE (1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13)

Paul prays that he'd be reunited, and that God would direct his way to them (vs. 11).

- Paul knew that this decision was ultimately in the hands of the all-knowing, all-powerful God, BUT Paul was not passive in his prayers- he was specific and bold.
- Do we have enough faith to pray these kind of specific, bold prayers from our heart to God's?

Paul prays that they'd, "increase and abound in love" (vs. 12)-this wasn't a loveless church, but they still had room to grow.

- Growing in love is often painful, because true Biblical love requires forgiveness, sacrifice, mercy, and the willingness to overlook offenses (1 Pet. 4:8).
- Jesus said that love was the essential mark of the Christian (Jn. 13:35).

A heart that's full of and being transformed by God's love is a heart established by God, "blameless in holiness" before Him.

- The holy and blameless heart is the heart that has no reason to be afraid or ashamed at "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (vs. 13).
- How can we be "blameless" before God on judgment day?

First, we must be positionally holy & blameless before God because we've received forgiveness, salvation, and redemption through Christ as a gift (Rom. 5:17, 1 Cor. 1:30).

- Secondly, we then draw strength from Christ and the Holy Spirit to, "live a life worthy of the calling we have received" (Eph. 4:1).
- God then helps us change our behavior to match our true-identity.

This means we make godly decisions, and we choose righteous, holy motives and actions.

- This means we **stop** doing things that God says "no" to because we love Him and want to please Him.
- Blamelessness doesn't mean perfection, but it does mean that we deal with sin as soon it enters in our hearts and lives through repentance and confession (1 Jn. 1:9).
- Choosing to follow Jesus always has and always will involve some level of "affliction".

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IN AMERICA TODAY?

Anti-Christian prejudice is rampant in social institutions such as academia, media, entertainment, online groups, and the arts. Characterizations of certain Christian doctrines are now being labeled as, "hate speech" (leading to censorship). This discrimination might range from mild disgust to eye-rolling ridicule to irrational hatred.

WHAT ABOUT FROM FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS?

We might get labeled as "judgmental", close-minded, or self-righteous when we refuse to participate in certain activities, or we hold to certain beliefs. We might get ridiculed or made fun of for believing what we believe. We might be excluded or left out of certain social circles.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST PERSECUTION...

"Affliction" will come to you through temptations, hardships, difficulties, and trials. It might come to you in the form of physical pain or emotional trauma. Satan specializes in exploiting affliction by lying to God's children- "God doesn't love you," "God is mad at you," "You should just give up."

WE ARE CALLED TO BE "ESTABLISHED IN YOUR FAITH... THAT NO-ONE BE MOVED BY THESE AFFLICTIONS" (VS. 3).

1. Get discipled and stay in Christian community ("we sent Timothy", vs. 2) Who is actively helping you get "established" (doctrine, disciplines, worldview) in your faith? Who is helping you stay "encouraged" to endure as you follow Jesus?
2. Take steps to grow in the areas you lack in your faith ("to supply what is lacking in your faith", vs.10) Where are you most vulnerable to deception, distraction, or discouragement? What are you doing to grow in those areas?
3. Ask the Lord to increase and abound your love and holiness (vs. 11-13) Does your behavior match your identity? Is your heart full of love? Is there any unforgiveness or offense you're holding onto? When you sin, do you deal with it quickly?