

Introduction

The Thessalonians were helped by Paul's first letter. However it didn't solve all their problems. Satan was working overtime in an attempt to stifle this fruitful Church. Things heated up as their persecution increased. Then a letter arrived supposedly from Paul stating that the Day of the Lord was actually present. Needless to say the assembly was confused and frightened. Some of the believers stopped working since Christ's return was so near. They placed an extra burden upon the rest of the fellowship. So Paul wrote to encourage them and correct these misconceptions. He began by dealing with their most urgent need, an explanation for their trials and suffering. Paul encouraged them three ways. ***He gave them:***

I. Praise For Past Progress

II. Promises Of Future Peace

III. Prayer For Present Purity

Firstly Praise For Past Progress

After Paul's customary greeting, he praised the Thessalonians for their spiritual growth. He emphasized 4 areas, *Enlarged Faith, Exuberant Love, Excellent Testimony, Enduring Faith*

a. Enlarged Faith

2Thess 1:3 *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,*

Firstly Paul praises them for their *enlarged faith*. The words ***grows exceedingly*** mean just that, ***to increase above ordinary degree***. In spite of severe affliction the Thessalonians had greatly increased their faith. *A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted*. God uses trials to prove whether our faith is genuine. Paul commended them for their *work of faith* in his first epistle. Now he thanked God for the exceeding growth of their faith. Often when we make progress in the Christian life we are tempted to rest on our laurels or slow down. This can be especially true of believers who are persecuted. They want to escape the heat for a while. The Thessalonians didn't do this. They persevered in their Christian walk. They kept growing. Their faith in God grew in the midst of suffering. *How did they do this?* Because they saw Paul, Timothy and Silas do it. The they imitated them. A true Christian who is growing will be faithful, come what may.

Faith: Walk the Talk -- A.W. Tozer

To many Christians, Christ is little more than an idea, or at best an ideal -- He is not a fact. Millions of professed believers talk as if He were real and act as if He were not. Our actual position is always to be discovered by the way we act, not by the way we talk.

b. Exuberant Love

The *second* thing Paul praised them for was *exuberant* or *abounding love*. Their love was abounding more and more. The word *abounds* pleonazw means *to increase, have over, make abundant*. It is like a glass that is filled to overflowing. Paul had commended them for their *labor of love* in his first letter. In the same letter he asked them to *let their love increase more and more*. They had heeded Paul's instruction and *were abounding* in love. *Suffering can make us selfish if we become absorbed with our own problems. But when suffering is mixed with grace and faith it produces love*. When the pagan world beheld the miracle of Christian Fellowship they said, "Behold how they love one another. Love is contagious. Jesus said, *by this will all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another*. Love working together with truth touches the lives of people like nothing else.

Love: Seasoned Salt

Sodium is an extremely active element found naturally only in combined form; it always links itself to another element. Chlorine, on the other hand, is the poisonous gas that gives bleach its offensive odor. When sodium and chlorine are combined, the result is sodium chloride--common table salt--the substance we use to preserve meat and bring out its flavor. Love and truth can be like sodium and chlorine. Love without truth is flighty, sometimes blind, willing to combine with various doctrines. On the other hand, truth by itself can be offensive, some times even poisonous. Spoken without love, truth can turn people away from the gospel. When truth and love are combined in an individual or a church, however, then we have what Jesus called "the salt of the earth," and we're able to preserve and bring out the beauty of our faith. -- *David H. Johnson*

c. Excellent Testimony

[2 Thessalonians 1:4](#) *so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,*

Paul's *third* point of praise was their *faithful testimony*. Everyone knew about their faith in Christ. They witnessed continually. Paul was able to use them as an example for other churches to follow. He *boasted* *kaucaomai* about them. *Boast* is the word we looked at this morning in [Philippians 3:3](#) where true worshippers *rejoice* or *boast* in Christ Jesus. When a person in

difficulty forsakes the Lord and the Church, they show that they have never been born again, or that their spiritual life is very weak. The Thessalonians didn't do this.

During World War II, when enemy armies invaded North Africa, the missionaries had to flee; and there was great concern over the churches left behind. But when the war ended and the missionaries returned, they discovered strong, thriving churches. The sufferings of war purified and helped strengthen the faith of true believers. They encouraged others greatly.

d. Enduring Faith

2 Thessalonians 1:4 *so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,*

Faith like Job's cannot be shaken because it is the result of having been shaken. -- Abraham Heschel

Paul's *fourth* point of praise was their *enduring faith*. They stuck it out through thick and thin. Paul commended them for *enduring* persecutions and tribulations. **Endure** ajnecomai means **to bear, to suffer, hold oneself up against**. They were being pressed into a narrow place, yet they remained steadfast. They didn't try and escape. They didn't deny their Lord. Rather they allowed God to develop their Christian character through these trials. Endurance or perseverance is not something that you can learn from a book or even a sermon. It comes through the furnace of suffering. It's gained through experience.

Polycarp the Martyr

The year was A.D. 155, and the persecution against Christians swept across the Roman empire and came to the city of Smyrna. The proconsul of Smyrna, swept up in this persecution, put out an order that the Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, was to be found, arrested, and brought to the public arena for execution. They found Polycarp and brought him before thousands of spectators screaming for blood. But the proconsul had compassion on this man who was almost a hundred years old. He signaled the crowd to silence. To Polycarp he said, "Curse the Christ and live."

The crowd waited for the old man to answer. In an amazingly strong voice, he said, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How dare I blaspheme the name of my king and Lord!" With that Polycarp became a martyr. -- *Leith Anderson*

Application

Firstly, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by praising them for their past progress. They had:

a. Enlarged Faith - The Thessalonians were commended for an enlarged faith. *Since you first trusted Christ can you say that your faith has grown? How has it grown? Do you trust God more now or less? Do you trust Him in trials? Have you yielded more of your life to Him?*

b. Exuberant Love - Paul praised them for abounding love. They had heeded his request to love one another more. *Is your love growing? How? Do you visit the sick? Do you help those going through family sorrow and loss? Do you use your home for hospitality?*

c. Excellent Testimony - Thirdly, Paul praised them for their testimony. *Do people know that you are a Christian? Do you share your faith at work or with your unsaved relatives? Do you witness to your neighbors? How many unsaved people know about your faith?*

d. Enduring Faith - Paul's final praise point was their patience in persecution. *Do you persevere when people ridicule you? Are you willing to suffer for your faith? Or do you deny your Savior? Do you encourage suffering believers as Paul did?*

Secondly Promises Of Future Peace

The second way that Paul encouraged these suffering saints was through promises of peace. He shared with them God's future plans for his people. This was just what they needed. In 1 Thessalonians Paul commended them for their faith, hope and love. In 2 Thessalonians Paul gave thanks for their faith and love. *What happened to their steadfast hope?* They had lost it amidst their suffering and their misconceptions about the day of the Lord. They thought that God was punishing them.

a. Reward

2 Thessalonians 1:5 *which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;*

Firstly Paul promised them that God would **reward** them for their faithfulness. He was allowing them to suffer persecution to show that they were worthy of the kingdom of God. God is showing all men that His judgment in rewarding His saints is right. The Lord will reward every sacrifice made for Himself. Jesus said this in **Matthew 5:10-12** *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* Paul says the reward is worth suffering for.

b. Retribution

2 Thessalonians 1:6,8-9 *since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,*

Secondly Paul says that God will repay their persecutors for their wickedness. When God recompenses, He pays in kind. This law has worked throughout human history. Pharaoh tried to drown all the Hebrew male babies, and his own army was drowned in the Red Sea. Haman plotted to wipe out the Jews and hang Mordecai on a special gallows he made for the purpose. Haman was himself hung on the gallows and his sons too. The advisers of King Darius deceived him so that they could have Daniel thrown into the lions den. But God overruled and they were thrown into the lions den with their families. God repays evil. He will give *tribulation, flaming fire, vengeance, everlasting destruction*. This is a serious thing.

People who say I cannot believe that a loving God will judge sinners and send people to hell understand neither the holiness of God nor the awfulness of sin. God's love and justice met together in the cross of Christ. It was the love of God that moved God to provide salvation for mankind. It was the justice of God that caused Christ to suffer so terribly in our place. Cancer is detrimental to the body, even though it grows in the body. To remove it from someone involves aggressive surgery, since you have to remove living tissue from the body. But to leave it there, knowing what it will do to that person's body is worse. God wants to remove the sin from our lives. But if we don't let Him, we will bear the consequences, eternal death.

c. Rest

2 Thessalonians 1:7,10 *and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

The **third** promise Paul gave was **rest**. The word **rest** *al'nesi*" means **liberty, ease, relief, relaxation**. The Thessalonians were laboring hard for their Lord. They were being oppressed from hostile people. But it wouldn't always be like that. One day Jesus Christ will return bringing rest and peace to His people. Our toil and labors will be over and we will glory in the Lord Jesus Christ. The reward He gives to faithful servants will make their afflictions seem nothing in comparison. He will wipe away every tear from His afflicted saints. The Thessalonians were being pressed into a tight place by their persecutors. Paul promised that Christ would relieve this pressure and replace it with **rest**.

Application

a. Reward - God doesn't punish His servants through suffering. Paul encouraged them. Their suffering would be rewarded. Their suffering proved that they're worthy of God's kingdom.

b. Retribution - God will reward His faithful servants and punish the wicked. They will receive what they've done out to others. God will return their wickedness upon their heads.

c. Rest - God's people toil and struggle now. But Christ will return one day and bring peace and rest. *Therefore we should labor diligently now since our labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Thirdly Prayer For Present Purity

Paul's **third** method of encouragement was prayer. He prayed diligently for them. You notice that he said he prayed *always* for them. This shows that Paul was disciplined in his life. He made time for prayer. He also prayed specifically. He had certain goals in mind.

2 Thessalonians 1:11 *Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power,*

a. Their Worthiness

Firstly Paul prayed that they would live in a manner worthy of their calling. *What did Paul mean by that?* Paul wanted them to live a holy life. He wanted them to continue to live by faith as they had started. He wanted them to fulfill God's plans for their lives. That they might devote themselves to good works as they had been doing up until now. Paul was confident that God's power was sufficient for this. They simply had to avail themselves of it by faith. *But why did Paul pray for more of the same?* They were already doing these things! Because there is always room for growth. This can be seen in the way that they had grown between Paul's first and second letters. Paul's desire was that they would keep growing in holiness and good works until Christ's return. This is what God requires from us. A life lived for God.

Worship is seeing what God is worth and giving him what he's worth. -- *Tim Keller*

Paul puts it like this in [Romans 12:1-2](#): *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* A worthy life is a life dedicated to service for God, a living sacrifice.

b. Their Witness

[2 Thessalonians 1:12](#) *that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Secondly Paul prayed that they might continue the good witness that they had shared from the beginning. Paul reflected how Macedonia and Achaia heard the word from the Thessalonians. He prays that the name of Jesus Christ might be glorified through their lives. Paul wanted them to share their faith and glorify God through holiness. *How would God accomplish this in their lives?* After all God is glorious and we are only human. *How can we glorify Jesus Christ?* The same way God saved us to start with. Through His grace. God would glorify His Son's name in them as they received His grace through faith.

Witnessing: Quit Talking and Go!

In our opinion, the greatest enemy of world evangelization is Christian rhetoric--the continual rhetorizing (playing the orator), discussing, arguing, the endless talking and preaching about evangelizing the world, without any of the crucial implementation. -- *David V. Barrett*

Application

Paul's third method of encouragement was prayer. He prayed that God would work in their lives so that they might fulfill their holy calling.

a. Their Worthiness - Paul prayed that the Thessalonians might live lives worthy of their calling. *Is this your desire? Do you pray this for yourself and others? Do you want to fulfill God's will for your life? Do you want to be a living sacrifice for God?* If you do, God's power is available for holy living through faith and prayer. We only need to ask for it.

b. Their Witness - Paul prayed that they might glorify Jesus Christ in their daily lives. He wanted them to have a positive witness in the community. *Is this your desire? Do you want to glorify Christ in all that you do? Do you ask God for grace to do this each day?*

Conclusion

Today we have seen how Paul encouraged the Thessalonian saints three ways. He gave them:

I. Praise For Past Progress

He *praised* them for, *Enlarged Faith, Exuberant Love, Excellent Testimony, Enduring Faith*

II. Promises Of Future Peace

He *promised* them, *Reward, Retribution & Rest*. God will overrule.

III. Prayer For Present Purity

He *prayed* for growth in their purity, *Their Worthiness & Their Witness*.

Benediction

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 *Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*