

# ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER / Sunday School- June 20, 2010

## Unifying Topic: SUSTAINED THROUGH ENCOURAGEMENT

### Lesson Text

I. Strong Faith During Trials (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

II. Standing Firm In The Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10)

III. Strengthen your Hearts (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

**The Main Thought:** Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith. (1 Thessalonians 3:7, KJV).

**Unifying Principle:** The many demands of daily life make it difficult to honor all our commitments. What can help us maintain lives that are faithfully committed to God? The test shows that Christian commitment is sustained in part through encouragement from others.

**Lesson Aim:** To teach how Paul encouraged the Thessalonians during their times of trouble.

**Life aim:** To teach how Christians will go through times of trials and persecution but that Christ gives us strength and encouragement during those difficult times as we provide support for one another and help each other.

- 3:1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;  
3:2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:  
3:3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.  
3:4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.  
3:5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.  
3:6 But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:  
3:7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:  
3:8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.  
3:9 For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;  
3:10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?  
3:11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.  
3:12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:  
3:13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

### **HISTORY:**

#### **Chapter 2:13-16 Reception of the Word**

Paul and the others began to thank God without ceasing for the Thessalonians for the simple reason of them receiving the Word of God when they heard it.

*Some people come into a church and there will be some little thing that will turn them off, and they won't be back again.*

*There will be people who will listen to the studies and be able to receive from the Lord. You see the excitement and anticipation in their eyes.*

*There are those who once got something out of the studies, but someone in church hurts their feelings, or something happens that slowly draws them away from the Lord and they no longer can receive.*

How can this be? Because part of the success of the process lies in the heart of the hearer. **A strong people receive the Word of God** as the word of God. They "*received*" (*Gr paralambanō*) which means to "*take to oneself*." In this context it means to listen to and apply the words that were spoken. It also means (*Gr dechomai*) primarily "*to receive*" in the sense of receiving a guest, entertaining someone; much more commitment. This is the word that shows the responsive attitude of all true believers for God's Word. The meaning in this book of Thessalonians is that the people not only recognized this message as something more than a merely human message (*word of men*), but welcomed it for what it really was, the Word of God. These people realized that when Paul was with them, it wasn't just Paul that was speaking, but God was speaking through Paul. **2:13** also says "*that it is the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*" What is it that we believe? God has loved us and has given us His Word—the very Word of God itself, the Holy Scriptures. "*Effectually worketh*" (*Gr emergeō*) means simply to be "*effective*." We must remember that Jesus Christ Himself is the "*Word*" (Jh.1:1).

**2:14** Paul calls them brethren because they became followers of the churches of God. The Thessalonians had a kinship with the church back in Judaea. They had both believed in the Lord Jesus and suffered for it. Just as the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted by their own people, so the Gentile Christians in Thessalonica were persecuted by their fellow Gentiles. It is discouraging to face persecution especially when it comes from your own people. But when we take a stand for Christ, we may face opposition, disapproval, ridicule, and persecution from our neighbors, friends, and even family members. **A strong people become followers of strong churches.** They stand fast in Christ despite trials, even when facing severe persecution. Note that it was their own countrymen who were persecuting them; both Jews and Gentile, but the instigators were the Jews.

**2:15-16** Why were so many Jews opposed to Christianity?

- *First*, although the Jewish religion was declared legal by the Roman government, it still had tenuous relationship with the government. At this time, Christianity was viewed as a sect of Judaism. The Jews were afraid that reprisals leveled against the Christians might be stretched to include them.
- *Second*, the Jewish leaders thought Jesus was a false prophet and they didn't want His teachings to spread.
- *Third*, they feared that if many Jews were drawn away, their own political position might be weakened.
- *Fourth*, they were proud of their special status as "*God's chosen people*" and they resented the fact that Gentiles were full members within the church.

The Jewish persecutors stood in opposition to Christ, and in opposition to God's very own Son. And remember they were religionists—a body of religious people who were set on destroying the Christian church in the name of religion. But the Thessalonian church and its believers stood in support of Christ; therefore, they escaped whatever guilt hangs over a person's head for opposing God's Son. **A strong church escapes the guilt of the Jews.** Sins leveled on the Jews were that:

- They killed the Lord Jesus (v15).
- They killed their own prophets (v15).
- They persecuted Christian believers (v15).
- They did not please God(v15).
- They were contrary to all men (v15).
- They tried to stamp out the Word of God lest some person be saved (v16).

**2:16b** The wrath of God is to come upon the Jews to the uttermost. Think for a moment: if Jesus Christ is truly God's Son, then the judgment of God upon the Jewish unbelievers is inevitable.

#### **Chapter 2:17-20 Longing to See**

**2:17** The fellowship of the Thessalonians was so strong that Paul just longed to return to them. Remember, he had been forced to flee the city because his life was being threatened by the persecution that had risen against the gospel. **A strong church posses a strong fellowship.** The ache of Paul's heart for the Thessalonians and their fellowship is seen in his emphasis:

- He had been taken from them in presence, but "*not in heart*."
- He "*endeavored*" (*spoudazo*) to return: eagerly "*sought*" to return; make a serious, concentrated effort to return.
- He "*abundantly*" or exceedingly sought to return.
- He sought to return "*with great desire*": with zeal, with intense longing, with strong passion.

What a fellowship they must have had—even in the face of persecution.

**2:18** However, despite his intentions, the apostle declared that "*Satan hindered us*." The word "*hindered*" means to cut in a road; to make a road impassable; to put up a roadblock for the purpose of stopping an expedition. When a church is as strong as the Thessalonian church, Satan is bound to do all he can to weaken it and stop its growth. One of the primary ways to weaken a church is to attack the minister of the church. This was the strategy in Thessalonica. What was the roadblock that Satan threw against Paul?

- Was it some illness? (2Corth.2:7; Gal.4:13).
- Was it some serious problem in Corinth where Paul was ministering—some serious problem that had been stirred up by Satan to keep Paul there and to prevent his return to Thessalonica? Remember: Corinth was full of carnal believers, prime prospects for Satan's attack (1Thess.3:1).

Just what the hindrance was is not known. Paul never downplayed the work and activity of Satan. He recognized the existence and activity of some terrible force of evil.

**2:19** Here, Paul makes use of three descriptive terms that depict his righteous sense of pride in his spiritual children. Paul clearly says that the Thessalonian believers were his **hope** and **joy** and **crown of rejoicing**. Note that each of the three words is qualified by the phrase "*in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming*." When? In the day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return and they will all stand in His presence. **A strong church is destined to bring glory and joy.** The picture is that we are in a contest, a spiritual struggle against Satan for the souls of men. Therefore, we must strain and struggle and fight for the souls of men. A crown awaits us, also known as the victor's crown. Have you ever won

a soul to Christ? Well the crown of rejoicing awaits the person who will be able to present souls to the Lord in that day.

**2:20** The ultimate reward for Paul's ministry was not money, prestige, or fame, but new believers whose lives had been changed by God through the preaching of the gospel. Saved people are the fruit and reward of faithful evangelism. Seeing people saved is the joy and glory of those who faithfully witness.

## LESSON:

### 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Strong Faith During Trials

#### Timothy's Service There:

This passage has to do with the faith of the Thessalonians. Their faith was strong and Paul wanted to make sure that it remained strong. The believers were suffering fierce persecution by both the Jewish and Gentile citizens of the city. Paul had fled to Athens, but his heart was in Thessalonica, longing for the believers who were suffering the fierce attacks of persecution. As the Thessalonians were a little new at being Christians, Paul says he had reached a point when he could no longer bear the suspense over their welfare. He had a deep concern and he didn't have any confirmation of their spiritual condition. Paul literally confesses that he was powerless to contain his anxiety any longer, **(3:2)** so he decided to send Timothy to help the Thessalonians while he himself continued the work in Athens. Had they cracked under the savage attacks of persecution? Or were they standing fast? Timothy was a dependable brother and minister/servant of the Lord. If anyone could help the believers, he could. Paul sent Timothy to establish and comfort them in their faith.

- "establish" (*Gr stērizō*) means to stabilize or to support an already existing structure—establishing stability and soundness.
- "comfort" (*Gr paraklēō*) means to encourage; the word from which we get the name the Holy Spirit in John, namely the "Comforter." Timothy would come alongside of his brothers and sisters in Christ for the purpose of providing them with continual comfort and assurance.

Thus, Timothy's essential task was to ensure that the Thessalonians would not be "*cajoled with smooth talk when they were in the midst of persecution and difficulties*" (Morris, 63).

**3:3** Paul explains Timothy's mission: "*That no man should be moved by these afflictions...*" "Moved" (*gr sainō*) means usually "wave", "wag the tail." Perhaps here it means "wobble" and thus "collapse." What is a strong faith? A strong faith is a faith that is not moved by afflictions. These "afflictions" (*Gr thlipsis*) are those which had just been experienced as reported by Timothy. This would carry on the figure of Timothy stabilizing or strengthening their faith like a wall. Paul says no man should be moved by these afflictions. Despite the shameful treatment and savage attacks, the believer is not to be moved away from Christ. But when the attacks are so severe and savage, how can the believer keep from being moved? How can he stand fast? By knowing these things:

1. The believer must know that he is appointed to persecution; he will suffer. Why does the world persecute the believer so much?
  - a. *Believers are persecuted because they are not of this world.* [They are "*the called out*" of the world].
  - b. *They are persecuted because believers strip away the world's cloak of sin.* [They live and demonstrate a life of righteousness].
  - c. *They are persecuted because the world does not know God nor Christ.* [They want no God other than themselves and their own imaginations. They want to do just what they want].
  - d. *They are persecuted because the world is deceived in its concept and belief of God.* [The world conceives God to be the One who fulfills their earthly desires and lusts (Jh.16:2-3). However, the true believer teaches against their concept of God].

<sup>1</sup>How a person gets through difficult times will often tell about just where their relationship with the Lord really is. If a person has no deep root in the Lord, they will be blown away by difficult times. They will walk away from the Lord and join those people who say, "*Well, I tried Christianity, but it didn't work for me.*" The problem isn't that Christianity didn't work; it's that a person wasn't clinging to Jesus in the difficult times. We often want to keep people from having to go through trials. We'd like to rescue them from their hard times, like a parent that constantly holds the child's hand to keep them from falling. But sooner or later you need to let them walk on their own. Sooner or later they will need to experience a scraped knee or two. It's the trials that refine our faith, that make us stronger. Keep these reasons in mind. They will help us to stand against persecution when it is launched against us.

**3:5** "*For this cause*", Paul again states his reasons for sending Timothy:

1. he had to know that the Thessalonians were surviving the temptations of Satan
2. and that Paul's work in them had not been in vain.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.calvaryfullerton.org/Bstudy/52%201Th/2000/521Th01-03.htm>

2. The believer must know that the temptation to cave in to persecution is of the tempter, of Satan himself. This is the very reason Satan has launched the persecution: to strike fear in the believer and silence him. Satan wants the believer to hush up about Christ and to desert Christ.
3. The believer must know that the labor and message of the minister is not empty.  
*Christ died for our sins that we might not perish. Christ gives us eternal life—gives us the privileges of living forever and ever in the new heavens and earth that He is to create.*

The work of the minister and of those who have taught us will have been useless if we give up and desert Christ. We must stand fast in afflictions, no matter how severe and savage. Standing fast in persecution is the sign of a strong faith.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10 Standing Firm In The Lord

### Response to Timothy's Report:

What is a strong faith? A strong faith is a faith that gives forth an excellent testimony. When Timothy returned from his mission to the Thessalonian church, he had a glowing report.

1. The believers were standing fast in their faith in Christ.  
They were not buckling under persecution nor to the temptation to be silent about Christ. They were not forsaking their worship of Christ. In practical terms, they were continuing to study the scriptures, pray, and worship together. And when possible, when it would not arouse opposition, they were sharing Christ and the promise of eternal life with all who would listen.
2. The believers were standing fast in love—love for Christ, each other, and their fellow men.  
They were ministering and meeting the needs of all those who would received their help. And they were doing all they could to demonstrate love and care and good citizenship toward all.

3. The believers also remembered their pastor, Paul, with the deepest of affection.  
Note that they longed to see him just as he longed to see them. What a dynamic testimony of strong faith.

- A faith that stands fast in the face of severe opposition.
- A faith that demonstrates the love of God—agape love.
- A faith that longs for fellowship with its pastor.

**3:7-10** What is strong faith? A strong faith is a faith that stirs the heart of its pastor and fellow believers. Note four significant points:

1. The strong faith of the Thessalonians believers comforted Paul, and Paul desperately needed comforting (v7). The word "*comforted*" (*paraklethemen*) means encouraged and strengthened. Why did Paul need encouragement and strengthening? It was not because of the Thessalonians, for Timothy's report had already comforted Paul's concern over them. Note Paul says, that he was in some affliction and distress. "*Affliction*" (*ananke*) means choking, intense pressure, and stress. "*Distress*" (*thlipsis*) means crushing trouble. The point is this: the testimony of the Thessalonians was strong, and God used it to help Paul in time of need. What a lesson for us! Our faith is used by God to strengthen and encourage others in their time of need. Therefore, we stand strong and grow stronger in faith.

2. The strong faith of the Thessalonians stirred renewed life and purpose in Paul (v8).  
Paul had been discouraged, not defeated, but discouraged because of the difficulties confronting him in Corinth. But when the news of the Thessalonian believers reached him, it ignited a renewed burst of life and purpose in him. He was stirred to minister and share Christ as never before, however, the Thessalonians were a testimony to Paul. They were suffering terrible persecution and remaining steadfast. Therefore, their steadfastness stirred him to bear the persecution launched against him. These dear people were a great encouragement to their pastor without their even knowing it. Their faithfulness was stirring him to be faithful—stirring him in one of those times when he needed encouragement.

3. The strong faith of the Thessalonians stirred joy in Paul (v9).  
Very simply, the news of the Thessalonian believers standing fast in their faith was bound to stir joy in their pastor's heart. He just burst forth praising and thanking God time and time again.

4. The strong faith of the Thessalonians believers stirred Paul to pray for their fellowship and growth in Christ (v10).  
Paul longed to be with them so that he could continue to share and grow them in Christ. He wanted to build them up and perfect whatever weaknesses they might have. What a pastoral heart! The heart to always proclaim and teach Christ until we are all perfected into the image of Christ.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 Strengthen your Hearts

This is Paul's great prayer for the Thessalonian church and its believers.

**3:11a** Paul prays both to God and Christ, and in so doing, he reveals who God is and who Christ is.

- Paul prays to God Himself: the Supreme and Majestic Being of the universe, the Supreme Intelligence, the

Creator and Maker of all things, the Giver and Sustainer of life and of everything else, the Person who dwells everywhere in perfect and supreme power, knowledge, and being.

- Paul prays to God our Father. God is a Father to us, intimately involved in our lives. He is not just in outer space ruling and reigning and being far removed from us. God our father is right here with us. He is actively participating in our lives just as an earthly father participates in the lives of his children. Therefore, Paul, as a child, approaches God our Father and asks Him for certain things and when he asks, he knows that his Father will hear and answer. He knows because God is not only able to answer, but God is his Father.
- Paul prays to our Lord Jesus Christ. The word "*Christ*" means "*Messiah*" and "*Savior*."

The point is this: Paul revealed that God Himself is our Father and that Jesus Christ Himself is the Lord God from heaven—that both the Father and Son have the nature of God. Therefore, both have co-existed eternally. For this reason, Paul prayed both to God our Father and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

**3:11b** Paul asked the Father and the Lord Jesus to direct and guide his way to the Thessalonians. He wanted both God and the Lord Jesus working to open the door for him to return to the dear believers at Thessalonica. Remember Satan had created some terrible problems and obstacles to keep Paul from returning to the church (1Thess.2:18; 3:7). But he longed to return, therefore, he wanted both the Father and the Son working on the matter. Hence, he addressed the request to both.

**3:12** The great need for which Paul prayed is the supreme need of every believer—the need for love, to grow in love more and more. The word "*increase*" (*pleonasa*) means to abound, to multiply over and over. The word "*abound*" (*perisseuai*) means to excel and overflow. But note the crucial point: the love being spoken about is not what the world means by love. This is seen in two significant points.

- The love that we must grow in is the love that makes us love *all men*, not just one another. "*And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men...*" The love we are to have is the love that reaches out and overflows and multiplies toward everyone. This means...
  - the unattractive
  - the ugly
  - the orphan
  - the sick
  - the hateful
  - the enemy
  - the murderer
  - the unclean
  - the homeless
  - the prisoner
  - the diseased
  - the spiteful
  - the oppressor
  - the poor
  - the unclothed
  - the widow and widower
  - the sinner
  - the opponent
  - the dictator

How in the world can we love some of these people? How can we abound in love for them? How is it possible to love those who do evil to us and who treat us as enemies? Is it even practical to ask us to love all men? Is it even humanly possible? No! It is not possible for us to love those who hate us and who stand as enemies against us—not humanly possible. But there is a way. However, there is only one way. This is the subject of the next point.

The source of love is the Lord. There is no other source, not for the kind of love that can love all men. This is the reason Paul went before the Lord and requested such a love. Paul knew that it was impossible for him or the Thessalonians to work up the kind of love that could reach out and abound toward all men. A love that could love those who could ignore, neglect, abuse, and shamefully mistreat us, could only come from God. There are four kinds of love:

1. There is passionate love or eros love. This is the physical love between sexes.
2. There is affectionate love or storge love. This kind of love that exists between parent and child.
3. There is endearing love or phileo love. This is the love of a husband and wife for each other.
4. There is selfless and sacrificial love or agape love. This is the love of the will rather than emotions.
  - a. It loves a person even if he does not deserve to be loved.
  - b. It actually loves the person who is utterly unworthy of being loved.

**3:13** The great result of love is to be presented unblameable before God when Christ returns to earth. This is the most glorious result imaginable. The word "*stablish*" (*sterixa*) means to prop, support, confirm, fix, make, fast, set. It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who stablishes our hearts before God. No one else has the right or power to set us before God. No one else can make us acceptable to God. The word "*heart*" here refers to the whole person or personality of man. The word "*unblameable*" (*amemptous*) means to be free from fault and blame; to be free from all charges. The word "*holiness*" (*hagiosune*) means to be set apart and be separated to God. He alone can free us from the faults and charges of sin. He alone can present us unblameable and holy before God. Just think about it: who else has such power? Do you know such a person? Man's only hope is Christ—that He truthfully has the righteousness and power to set us unblameable and holy before God.

When is this glorious presentation to God going to take place? When Christ returns with all His saints; that is with all the holy and glorified people of God, He will present all believers—every single one of us, to God:

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

- All the believers who have died and gone to be with the Lord
- All the believers who are raptured when He returns.

What a coronation, the glorious day of our presentation before God—meeting Him face to face and being presented to Him unblameable and holy—to be with Him forever and ever! It is the promise of God Himself and therefore it cannot be stopped! And no man should want to stop it. On the contrary, all men should prepare and welcome it.

### SUMMARY:

The apostle Paul calls to remembrance events both during and after his previous visit to Thessalonica. The action during his visit: Paul warned the church that they could expect future persecution because of their faith in Christ; this soon came to pass. The action after his visit: In Athens, he experiences great concerns over the spiritual welfare of the church in Thessalonica. Therefore, he sent Timothy to minister to them. Timothy brings back the joyous news that the Thessalonians are growing in faith and love. Paul is greatly comforted by this news.

The one thing needed by Christians is a strong faith: a faith that honestly knows Christ and knows what it is to walk in Him day by day, and trusting Him. He stressed their faith five times in the first ten verses. Paul...

- wanted to comfort—that is, strengthen their faith (v2).
- wanted to know if their faith was standing against the tempter's temptation (v5).
- received word that their faith and love were strong (v6).
- was comforted over their faith (v7).
- wished to perfect their faith (v10).

Paul now lifts up a twofold prayer request. Paul asks God for himself to permit him to go visit the church again. And a prayer for the church—that their love will both increase and overflow—that their hearts would be strengthened in matters of holiness. These Thessalonians had much help through committed men of God. They were sustained through the encouragement of Paul and even Paul sending Timothy. Their strong faith was because of the Word of God already planted in them. With strong faith in God's Word, they knew how to stand firm in the only true and living God. They knew how to be unmovable, increase, and always abound even in times of persecution. Just knowing all this brought joy and strength to Paul. He then knew all that was done in the Thessalonian believers was not done in vain as he continued to pray for them.

### APPLICATION:

Strength comes to you while you're strengthening someone else. Keep the Word of God before you when going through the challenges of life. An encouraging word is always comforting to those you haven't seen in awhile and those you see everyday! Begin to make that a priority! You'll never know who need it!