

TITLE: STRENGTH IN SUFFERING

TEXT: 1 THESS 3

INTRO: There is *no excuse* for a Christian *not* to expect at least some type of persecution for being a Christian. The NT is clear in many places that Christians *will* suffer persecution. New Christians certainly are not exempt from this. Knowing this, Paul was clearly concerned with how the Thessalonian congregation was doing in its infancy.

I. WHAT PERSECUTION SHOULDN'T DO (v. 1-5):

- A. (v. 1) We could no longer forbear – they could only go so long without finding out how the Thessalonian brethren were doing! We thought it good to be left alone! In comparison, it was better to be left alone (w/out Timothy) than not to know about them!
- B. (v. 2) So we sent Timothy
 - 1. They needed Timothy. Paul chose Timothy as a helper. Paul & Silas were benefited by having him with them.
 - 2. Here is a great affirmation of and statement of faith in Timothy – brother, minister (servant) of God, and fellow worker in the gospel of Christ. Would Paul have sent *you* on this mission? Would he have said these things about *me*?
 - 3. Purpose: to establish (set, strengthen, fixed- as in **Lk 16:26**-“*great gulf fixed between us*”) and to comfort you (parakaleo). “Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”
- C. (v. 3) Afflictions
 - 1. No man should be moved (agitated, shaken, disturbed, troubled). **Psa 62:2**-“*He only is my rock, salvation, defense...I shall not be greatly moved.*” We should *expect* affliction (**1 Pet 4:12-13**-“*Beloved, think it not strange...but rejoice*”; **2:21**-“*for even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example...*”). God doesn't necessarily *want* affliction/persecution to exist; this is just the way it is. The world is evil and hates true godliness/righteousness. Therefore, “*all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” –**2 Tim 3:12**.
 - 2. But just because we're appointed to suffering, doesn't mean we can't & shouldn't work together to encourage each other in it. We can help each other deal with it better. And this is what Paul did in sending Timothy, & in writing this letter.
- D. (v. 4) We told you affliction would come...and it did! Not only did P,S,&T know in general that persecution follows righteousness, they also knew specifically, having experienced it in most every city they'd preached!
- E. (v. 5) “I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you.” He just said that affliction shouldn't move them (v. 3), but he still needed to know if it had or not. It was not only *possible*, but it was *probable* that they had fallen away under this persecution. The tempter (Satan) uses our own inordinate desires (**Jam 1:14**), and certainly new Christians would still be struggling with these desires. Paul didn't want his work to have been in vain (empty).

II. WHAT PERSECUTION SHOULD DO (v. 6-8):

- A. (v. 6) Timothy told us of your faith (obedient belief), and love, and good remembrance of us always, that you long to see us. This is great news, considering the lies that have probably been told about Paul since he left!
- B. (v. 7) Christians need other Christians to encourage each other. We suffer together (**1 Pet 5:9**); we are victorious together! Paul was comforted in his own affliction when he heard this report from Thessalonica.
- C. (v. 8) “For now we live, if you stand fast (persevere) in the Lord.” Your steadfastness and perseverance is so encouraging to me that I can keep living and working. Think about this from both sides – the teacher *and* the one taught/converted.

III. PRAYER IN PERSECUTION (v. 9-13):

- A. (v. 9-10) Prayers for the Thessalonians - How can we thank God enough for you? (render = repay w/thanks & appreciation)
 - 1. (v. 9) For the joy you bring us – how can repay God for the joy He's given us because of your faithfulness?
 - 2. (v. 10a) That we might see you -
 - 3. (v. 10b) That we might help you increase your faith – new Christians need to keep studying & growing (*as newborn babes...***1 Pet 2:2**). And they need concerned, loving, brethren - teachers & mentors like Paul, who will do anything to help them grow & succeed as Christians.
- B. (v. 11-13) Prayer continues (“how can we thank God enough” – and so the prayer continues!)
 - 1. (v. 11) Direct our way to you – here he prays for God's involvement against Satan's efforts to keep them apart (**2:18**). This prayer would be answered during the 3rd MJ (**Acts 20:1-6**), when they returned through that area twice.
 - 2. (v. 12) Continued prayer for their love **1**) toward one another, and **2**) toward all men. Love resolves many problems (covers many sins -**1 Pet 4:8**) among brethren. And, love causes us to seek & save the lost. This love *must* continue to increase!
 - 3. (v. 13) Continued prayer for their obedience
 - a. Unblameable in holiness (moral purity) – **2 Cor 7:1**-“*let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*”
 - b. At the coming of Christ – faithful either until death or until Christ returns. Remember that Paul doesn't know when Jesus is coming back (**Mt 24:36**). But this sets up the topic he'll address in 4:13-18.

CONCLUSION: Paul loved the Thessalonian church very much. It was this love that caused him to **1**) recognize that they were being persecuted for Christianity, and **2**) to write to them and encourage them in this (even though he had already talked to them about it - v.4). He knew they would suffer, and we too need to realize that *all will suffer persecution* (**2 Tim 3:12**).

Is our brand of persecution really much better? Today we're mocked and spoken against because we refuse to water down (and ignore) God's Word like our religious neighbors. We're persecuted for claiming that God's Word *really means what it says!* If Paul were here today, he would probably write similar words to us. Paul isn't here, but his words are, and we should use these to comfort each other (**4:18**). Stand firm! Keep teaching the truth! Keep living Christ's example!