

Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians II Thessalonians

Lift Up Your Hearts (2 Thess. Chapter 1)

There is all the wisdom of the wise leader in this opening passage. It seems that the Thessalonians had sent a message to Paul full of self-doubt. They had been timorously afraid that their faith was not going to stand the test and that they were not going to make the grade. Paul's answer was not to push them further into despondency by pessimistically agreeing with them but to pick out their virtues and achievements in such a way that these despondent, frightened Christians might square their shoulders and say, "Well, if Paul thinks that of us, we'll make a go of it.

There are three things which Paul picked out as being the marks of a vital Church

1. *A faith which is strong.* It is the mark of the advancing Christian that he grows surer of Jesus every day. The faith which may begin as an hypothesis, ends as a certainty.
2. *A love which is increasing.* A growing Church is one which grows in service. A man may begin serving his fellow men as a duty which his Christian faith lays upon him, he will end by doing it because in it he finds his greatest joy. The life of service opens up the great discovery that unselfishness and happiness go hand in hand.
3. *A constancy which endures.* The word Paul uses (*hupomone*) is usually translated as *endurance* but does not mean the ability to bear anything that may descend upon us. It has been described as "a masculine constancy under trial" and describes the spirit which not only endures the circumstances in which it finds itself but masters them. It accepts the blows of life but in accepting them transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement.

Paul's uplifting message ends with the most uplifting vision of all. It ends with what we might call *the reciprocal glory*. When Christ comes

he will be glorified in his saints and admired in those who have believed. Here we see that our glory is Christ and Christ's glory is ourselves. The glory of Christ is in those who through him have learned to endure and to conquer, and so to shine like lights in a dark place.

Do we not occasionally question our “worthiness?” Can we “grade” ourselves on our “strength,” our “love,” our “endurance?” What can we do to increase these three?

The Lawless One (2 Thess. 2:1-12)

This is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament; because it is using terms and thinking in pictures which were familiar to those to whom Paul was speaking but which are strange to us.

The general picture is this; Paul was telling the Thessalonians that they must give up their nervous waiting for the Second coming. He denied that he had ever said that the Day of the Lord had come. That was a misinterpretation of his words. He told them that before the Day of the Lord could come, much had still to happen.

First there would come an age of rebellion against God; into this world that had already come a secret evil power which has working in the world and on men to bring this time of rebellion. He was the man of Sin (the Anti-Christ). When he came, he would gather his own people to him just as Christ had gathered his. Those who had refused to accept Christ were waiting to accept him. Then would come a last battle in which Christ would utterly destroy The Lawless One. Christ's people would be gathered to him and the wicked men would be destroyed.

What was the restraining force which was still keeping the Lawless One under control? Most likely Paul meant the Roman Empire. Time and again he was to be saved from the fury of the mob by the justice of the Roman Magistrate. But the day would come when that power would be removed – then there would be chaos.

1. However remote these pictures may be from us, they nevertheless have certain elements of truth in them.
 2. There is a force of evil in the world.
 3. God is in control. Even the chaos is in God/s control.
- The ultimate triumph of God is for sure. In the end, nothing can stand against Him.

Do we see the “anti-Christ” in our day? Where? On what side are we? How confident are we that God will win out?

God’s Demand And Our Effort (2 Thess. 2:13-17)

Here there is a kind of synopsis of the Christian life:

1. It begins with God’s call. We could never even begin to seek God unless He had already found us.
2. It develops in our effort. The Christian is not called to dream, but to fight; not to stand still, but to climb. The Christian is called not only to the greatest privilege but also to the greatest task in the world.
3. This effort is helped continually by two things.
 - a. It is helped by the teaching, guidance and example of godly men. God speaks to us through those to whom He has already spoken (the saints – a person who makes it easier for others to believe in God).
 - b. It is helped by God himself. We are never left to fight and toil alone. He who gives us the task also gives us the strength to do it; He actually does it with us. (Paul at Corinth, heard the Lord say to him “Do not be afraid ... for I am with you” (*Acts 18:9,10*).
4. This call and this effort are designed to produce two things.
 - a. They are designed to produce *consecration on earth (set apart for God)*.
 - b. They are designed to produce *salvation in heaven*. The Christian life does not end with time; its goal is eternity.

How does our “Christian Life” stand up to this synopsis? How much do we rely on Christ? Or on ourselves?

A Final Word (2 Thess. 3:1-5)

Once again Paul ends his letter with the request that his people should pray for him. There is something deeply moving in the thought of this giant among men asking for the prayers of the Thessalonians who recognize their own weakness. Nowhere is Paul's humility more clear to see.

But in spite of his love for and trust in men, Paul was a realist. The faith, he said is not for everyone. He said this, not cynically but sorrowfully. Here we see the power of "free will." We can use it to open our hearts or we can use it to shut it.

In the last verse, we see what we might call the inward and the outward characteristics of the Christian.

Inward – awareness of the love of God, knowing that we cannot drift beyond his care, His arms are always supporting us.

Outward – the endurance that only Christ can give. We live in a world where there are more nervous breakdowns than any other time in history. It is a sign that more and more people have the feeling that they cannot cope with life. When others break, a Christian stands erect, and when others collapse, he stands erect, shoulders his burden and continues on.

Where do we "put our trust?" What can we do to keep that trust growing, and where it belongs?

Discipline In Brotherly Love (2 Thess. 3:6-18)

Here Paul is dealing, as he had to deal in the previous letter (First Thessalonians) with the situation produced by those who took the attitude to the Second Coming. There were those in Thessalonica who gave up their work to wait in excited idleness for Christ to come.

To bring them to their senses, Paul quotes his own example. All his life he was a man who worked with his hands. He was a trained Rabbi; but a Rabbi must have a trade and satisfy his daily needs with the work of his hands.

In this we have the example of Jesus himself. He was the carpenter of Nazareth. A tree is known by its fruits and a man is known by his work.

Paul disliked the busybody. There may be greater sins than gossip, but there is none which does more damage in the Church. A man who is doing his own work with his whole strength will have enough to do without being maliciously interested in the affairs of others.

Paul commands that those who disregard his instructions must be dealt with by the community. But they are to be dealt with not as enemies but as brothers. When Christian discipline is necessary, it is to be given as by a brother to a brother, not in anger, still less in contempt but always in love.

At the end, Paul adds his “signature” to authenticate his letter. With the truth expounded, with praise and rebuke lovingly intermingled, he commends the Thessalonian Church to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can, and do we correct with “Love?” If we have anything to say about someone else, is it always and only “Good?” We can all see faults in others, let us pray for the “strength” of Jesus, and the “wisdom” of the Holy Spirit to bring him closer to God – or don’t say anything at all.