

Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Concern for the Brethren



Immersion is not the end for the Christian; it is the beginning. There are spiritual mountains and caves and holes in the ground that must be endured victoriously. There are battles to fight, betrayals to overcome, strategies to orchestrate, and enemies to defeat. The warfare, while spiritual rather than physical as it was in the Old Testament, is just as intense. Thus the New Testament writings are replete with warnings, instructions, and concerns for the brethren as they engage in their solo skirmishes and as they collectively battle for the purity and progress of their local churches. Hence the apostle Paul, working with so many brethren, and involved with so many congregations in the ongoing striving against the forces of darkness and for the victory of the light,

exuded solicitude for all the brethren. In describing his beatings and challenges of survival while taking the gospel everywhere he could go, he commented, "Apart from such external things, there is daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28). He exhibits that concern for the congregation in Thessalonica.

- **Enduring no longer** — Paul was not long in Thessalonica or that region of Macedonia. He had not preached for many weeks before the Jews from Thessalonica drove him out of that region and he ended up in Athens, where Timothy apparently was able to join him shortly thereafter. In view of the fact that the congregation had begun in a cauldron of controversy, Paul's spirit was troubled as he undoubtedly prayed and waited for word of the health of the congregation. "Therefore when we could endure it no longer," he explains, "we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone" (1 Thessalonians 3:1). His concern was so intense it was like severe pain, pain that could be tolerated no longer.
- **Sending Timothy** — To find out the condition of the brethren in Thessalonica, the apostle was able to send one of his most trusted lieutenants. Because of the burden of not knowing how well the brethren were faring, "we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; and we sent Timothy our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ" (1 Thessalonians 3:2). It was better to send Timothy to find out rather than to have his companionship—this shows how intense the concern was. Timothy, of course, was highly recommended by Paul as his "brother" and "fellow worker."
- **Strengthen and encourage** — The apostle's concern was that their faith remain intact in the face of the tremendous opposition by the Jewish element. Timothy, then, was also coming to Thessalonica "to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions, for you know that we have been destined for this" (1 Thessalonians 3:2,3). The preaching and teaching of Timothy would enable them to focus — by faith — on Christ in glory, and thus be undisturbed by the earthly challenges in which they were immersed.
- **Suffer affliction** — One of the great mental challenges for saints is to accept that to be a Christian also means to be persecuted. "We were destined for this," the apostle had noted. "For indeed when we were with you," he asks them to recall, "we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it has come to pass, as you know" (1 Thessalonians 3:4). This certainly flies in the face of the so-called "health, wealth, and happiness" gospel.

On concluding their work on the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas informed the brethren, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The modern saint must take this perspective into consideration as the world moves on toward its final destruction. Evil men will proceed from bad to worse, and the gospel of Christ will be increasingly hated in civilizations that have deliberately turned their backs on God. Hence the brethren of today need the same type of strengthening and encouragement that their first century counterparts in Thessalonica experienced. May today's preachers and teachers be up to the task!

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