



## Overpowering the Tempter

"How's your faith?" is a fair and honest question. Since a Christian is saved by faith, justified by faith, lives by faith, and walks by faith, the condition of the faith of the individual certainly needs to be monitored. The "testing of your faith," affirmed James, "produces endurance" (James 1:3). Peter added, "the proof of your faith [*the faith* being more precious than perishable gold] may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). The honest concern, then, of the apostle Paul would be connected with how the faith of the persecuted and tested brethren was holding up.

◆ **Finding out** — Paul was recalling the tremendous persecution that came upon the fledgling church in Thessalonica. "For this reason," he explains, "when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Obviously, the concern for the brethren was weighing heavily upon the apostle, and he just had to send someone to find out their status. But what he was concerned about was not their physical health or whether any grandbabies had been born to families of the congregation; he was solicitous about the status of their faith, whether it was remaining firm and growing in strength. If they lost their faith, they were essentially "toast" at Judgment Day.

◆ **The tempter** — The tempter, of course, is Satan, who tempted Jesus Himself in the wilderness. The wiles of the schemer and his power to impede the gospel are variously indicated in the scripture; the apostle had just commented on how Satan thwarted even he, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, more than once. Wondering, therefore, how the congregation in Thessalonica was faring, he "could endure it no longer," and sent Timothy to assess the strength of their faith, "for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain." Temptation is not just dealing with overcoming personal bad habits; the possibility of giving up in the face of persecution is the particular temptation Paul is dealing with here. Had they yielded, had the brethren quit following the Lord and assembling as a congregation, Paul's labor would have been in vain. Modern Christians would do well to begin to strengthen their faith and steel themselves for the possibility of suffering, memorizing scripture and disciplining the mind for what is to come.

*One temptation is giving up in the face of persecution.*

◆ **News from Timothy** — As mentioned, Timothy was sent from Athens to find out the condition of the faith of the brethren. What would be the news when Timothy returned? "But now that Timothy has come to us from you," rejoices the apostle, noting that he "has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you" (1 Thessalonians 3:6). The brethren's faith was intact; praise the Lord! Their love was still strong; praise the Lord! Their desire was to at some point see the apostle Paul again; praise the Lord!

The earnest desire of the Lord Jesus Christ is for the salvation of the lost among the sons of men. Clearly He does not wish "for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He longs for fellowship with His saints, and has set in motion His tremendous plan to reach and redeem every truth-seeker on the face of this planet. To accomplish this, He has implanted His love in the hearts of His servants so that they might carry His message to the lost and keep preaching and teaching to preserve the saved. Hence it is that the apostle Paul is truly concerned about the brethren in Thessalonica, and, with every fiber of his being, hopeful that they will be able to come through the fires of persecution and the wiles of temptation orchestrated by the prince of darkness. Thus he was tremendously excited when Timothy brought back a positive report of the progress of the saints, how they had overpowering the efforts of the tempter!