

Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Introduction

Turn in your copy of God's Word to 1 Thessalonians (page 927 in the Pew Bible).

We are in Week 5 of our sermon series through Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

- **Background**
 - This NT book is actually a letter written by the Apostle Paul, along with Silvanus and Timothy, to the church at Thessalonica (in northern Greece), which Paul founded during the second of his three missionary journeys.
- We are going to be in 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13, where we will see a **main idea** that: **Christian encouragement matters.**

With this in mind, let's read our main passage.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13.

Foundation

Outline:

- (1) 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5
- (2) 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10
- (3) 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

(1) 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

- Paul reminds the church why he sent Timothy to them.
 - Paul wanted desperately to return to Thessalonica, but we found out in 2:18 that he kept being hindered from going.
 - Because of his desperation and hinderances, Paul was willing to sacrifice for the sake of the Thessalonian church.
 - Christianity and sacrifice go hand-in-hand.
 - Observations about Christianity and sacrifice:
 - (1) Being a Christian is not about convenience, selfishness, always getting what we want when we want it, putting our needs first.
 - On the contrary, being a Christian is about sacrifice, selflessness, and putting the needs of others above our own.
 - Paul probably would have rather had Timothy with him for the mentorship, discipleship, and companionship, BUT sent Timothy to Thessalonica because the need for Timothy to be there with the church was greater than the need for him to be with Paul.
 - Church Family, there are going to be times in your Christian life that you may want one thing, but for the sake of the gospel and the good of others, you will need to sacrifice your wants.

- The mark of a true Christian and a maturing Christian is someone who makes the sacrifices necessary to follow Jesus to the fullest and for the good of others, particularly our brothers and sisters in the faith.
 - Are you someone who leans more toward sacrifice or convenience . . . who leans more toward selflessness or selfishness?
- (2) Christian sacrifice is about quality and purpose.
 - Quality.
 - Timothy wasn't a second rate replacement, he wasn't the leftovers that could be spared.
 - Timothy was not only Paul and Silvanus "brother," but also "God's coworker in the gospel."
 - Timothy was not only someone of quality that was approved by Paul and Silvanus, but also approved by God.
 - Church Family, a true sacrifice is us giving up things of quality, not just those things we no longer want or are second rate.
 - III—Casey and I as kids.
 - Growing up with a twin meant we had two of everything.
 - When we decided we wanted to play a game with our toys, I would always go to the toy box first, get both of them, examine them to see which was better, and then I would take the better one and leave Casey with the worse one.
 - This IS NOT what we are talking about as it comes to Christian sacrifice.
 - Quality within sacrifice matters.
 - Purpose.
 - Timothy was sent for a purpose: "to establish and exhort [the church] in [their faith]."
 - Church Family, a true sacrifice is giving up something for a purpose.
 - I may give up something of quality, but if I am just giving it away for no purpose, then it doesn't really help someone else, so it isn't really a sacrifice.
 - Purpose within sacrifice matters.
 - A true sacrifice that we make as Christians is one that causes us to give up something we want that is of quality and is given for a purpose.
- As we continue in 3:1-5, Paul reminds the church once again about suffering.
 - We talk about this in depth last Sunday, so if you missed that you can catch up on our app or website.

- Now, we will take a brief look at it.
- Paul brings up a point here that we didn't touch on last week: suffering can lead Christians to one of two responses.
 - (1) respond in turning to God.
 - In the midst of suffering, we can see our desperate need for God, His provision, and thus turn to and cry out to him.
 - Think about David in the Psalms:
 - David cries out something like "God, my enemies are going to overtake me" or "God, why have you forsaken me" . . . BUT then cries out something like "Still I hope and trust in You, My God, my rock, my redeemer, my refuge."
 - (2) respond in turning from God.
 - In the midst of suffering, we can blame God for our desperate needs and thus turn away from Him.
 - Think about Cain in Genesis 4:
 - God rejected Cain's offering, and instead of turning to God, he turned from God, and how did that turn out? . . . killing his brother Abel and being banished.
 - Church Family, as we talked about last Sunday, it is not if BUT when we are facing suffering (Paul says here 3:3, "destined for this"), will our response turn us closer to God or further from Him?
- Still yet in 3:1-5, Paul reminds the church once again about the tempter.
 - Paul mentioned Satan, the tempter, in 2:18 from our passage last Sunday, and then mentions him once again here in 3:5.
 - Satan, the adversary of God and God's people, is the great tempter and deceiver.
 - Satan tempted Jesus within the Gospels, and he comes after those who follow Jesus as well.
 - Satan would like nothing more than to bring turmoil to God's people, their faith, and their testimony . . . he would like nothing more than to undo the labor of mature Christians with new Christians.
 - Temptation is a real thing, temptation from Satan and his minions is a real thing, AND thus the need for the countless verses in the NT concerning spiritual warfare and Christians being prepared and on guard.
 - If you are a new Christian, be aware of the great tempter and the temptations you will face . . . if you are a mature Christian, realize you are never going to outgrow this, so be aware . . . if you are discipling a new or less mature Christian, remind them of this and help them learn how to deal with the tempter and temptation from a biblical standpoint.
 - Biblical passages:
 - Matthew 4:1-11 (temptation of Jesus by Satan)
 - Ephesians 6:10-20 (armor of God)
 - Hebrews 4:14-16 (Jesus, as our great high priest, experienced what we did)
 - James 4:1-10 (sound Christian advice)

(2) 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

- Paul reminds the church of the encouraging report that Timothy brought to him and Silvanus about them.
 - Satan, the tempter, had not caused the church to falter, and because of their faith and love, Paul and Silvanus were encouraged, even in the midst of their own suffering.
 - Faith and love are vital characteristics and fruits of what it means to be a Christian.
 - **Faith—a belief in God that leads to a trust and assurance in God.**
 - God is who He says He is and does what He says He will do.
 - Christians have faith, and it helps change who they are, because God works in and through them with His indwelling Holy Spirit.
 - Christians have faith, and it changes what they do, particularly as it comes to how they handle not only their day-to-day, but also how they understand the future and look toward it.
 - **Love (agape)—selfless, sacrificial, giving.**
 - Christians have love, and it changes who they are, particularly as it involves their ability to deal with their pride and selfishness.
 - Christians have love, and it changes what they do, particularly as it involves how they treat others.
 - Church Family, as a Christian, you should have a faith and love that not only is apart of who you are, but is a fruit and lived out for the glory of God and the good of others, and that others should be able to notice.
 - Along with this, our faith and love, as well as our Christian life and testimony, should be able to be an encouragement to other Christians.
 - As a Christian, you are a part of the family of God that includes all Christians around the world AND those in the local church that you are within.
 - The faithfulness of our Christian life can be an encouragement and blessing to our fellow brothers and sisters.
 - We don't always know what someone else is going through, AND we don't know how God can use the faithfulness of our Christian life to help them through it.
 - On the opposite, the faithlessness of our Christian life can be a discouragement and burden to our fellow Brothers and Sisters.
 - They may feel the added weight of trying to help us when we need to be the ones who are helping them.
 - Salvation is not the end BUT the beginning.
 - It is not a thing we check off and then go back to life as "normal."

- Salvation changes everything, and salvation leads to sanctification, a continual process that Christians go through to become more mature, holy, and conformed into the image of Jesus.
- Salvation is not the end, and our Christian lives and testimonies from that moment forward matters, not only as it comes to our relationship with God, but also our relationship with our fellow Christians.
- Paul and Silvanus were already suffering and struggling, and if they would have heard a discouraging report about the faith of the church from Timothy, it would have caused them more and unnecessary suffering and struggling
- However, because of the encouraging report from Timothy, even in the midst of their suffering, they were able to feel and experience some “comfort . . . thanksgiving . . . joy.”
- This comfort, thanksgiving, and joy came because of the faithfulness of the church in their Christian life and because of what Paul says in 3:8, “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.”
 - Pastor/Theologian John MacArthur explained that “standing fast” refers to “an army that refuses to retreat even though it is being assaulted by the enemy.”¹
 - Paul knew now that those in Thessalonica were Christians, Satan, the tempter, would be coming after them because spiritual warfare is real and they are now engaged as active duty, front line soldiers in the spiritual war.
 - Paul was so encouraged in how they had stood firm and fought, how they had not retreated or given in.
 - Church Family, for those we are discipling as Christians (grow and mature), we need to help them understand the spiritual war in which they are now engaged, be ready for this, and we need to encourage and praise them as they succeed, and we need to be encouraged and give praise and thanks to God for their success.
 - Also, we need to be reminded that we constantly are engaged in the spiritual war as well, and not let our guards down, but be alert and on guard.
 - Paul mentions how he and his companions “pray most earnestly night and day” for the church.
 - Of all the things we can do for and equip with those we disciple, one of the most vital is praying for them.
 - God can do abundantly more that we can, and the depth of our prayer life reveals the depth of our faith and reliance upon God.

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1815.

- Those you are discipling, don't neglect your teaching and training them, and most importantly, don't neglect your constant praying for them.

(3) 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

- 3:11-13a
 - This will be the focal point of our application.
- 3:13b—Paul reminds the church that Jesus is coming back.
 - Jesus is coming back.
 - The Bible says that no one knows the day or time, and the Bible also says that Jesus will return to gather His people, defeat Satan once and for all, and judge those who have rejected Him.
 - Church Family, we need to live in light of the fact that Jesus will return.
 - This should cause us to live every day in faithfulness and obedience to Jesus because if He were to return today, we should want to be found doing what He has called and commanded us to do.
 - This should also cause us to live with urgency as it comes to evangelism (sharing the gospel with those who aren't Christians) because once Jesus returns, it will be too late for those who have rejected Him.
 - III—Forrest Frank, "Jesus is Coming Back Soon"
 - "I can't help but recognize, We live life on borrowed time, He could come back in our lives, I wonder what we'd do if we knew, Jesus is coming back soon."
 - What we should be doing with this knowledge is living every day to the fullest for Jesus, ready if that day ends up being today.
 - Church Family, be both encouraged and challenged that Jesus is coming back.

Application

How do we apply this passage to our lives?

- 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13
- Main Application—Christian encouragement matters, both for new and mature Christians, and particularly as we pray.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

- Paul provides encouragement for the church, as they had provided encouragement for him.
 - All Christians needs encouragement.
 - We never outgrow or mature to the degree this is not necessary.
 - Paul provides this encouragement through what he is praying and asking God for.
 - Hear the encouragement that Paul is praying for, and as you do, be encouraged by it, be challenged by it, and know what you can be praying for those you are discipling.
 - 3 takeaways:
 - (1) God directs the paths of His people.

- Paul encourages the Thessalonian church that he is praying for God to “direct our way to you.”
- Satan, his minions, and the world can try to derail God’s plan and God’s people, but at the end of the day, nothing and no one can thwart the plans and paths of God.
- God is sovereign, His plan is sovereign, His path for His people is sovereign, and God always has, is, and will continue to direct the paths of His people.
- Proverbs 3:5-7—“5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.”
- Church Family, turn to God, trust in God, because when we don’t know, God knows . . . when we can’t see, God sees . . . when we think we may know what is best, God 100% knows what is best.
- Trust in the Lord, acknowledge Him, be not wise in your own eyes, AND allow Him to direct your paths because where you end up will be far better than where you would have ended up if it was up to you.
- Do you want to end up where you are supposed to? Then you must be directed by God.
- (2) God increases the love of His people.
 - Paul encourages the Thessalonian church that he is praying God would increase their “love for one another and for all.”
 - We have already talked about it this morning: love is an important characteristic and fruit of being a Christian.
 - Love is a common characteristic and action for all people, but love as Christians is different than love as non-Christians.
 - In our inherent and sin nature, we are prideful and selfish people who love ourselves.
 - Yes, we can come to love others, but our pride and selfishness will get in the way of us loving them truly and fully.
 - Only when God saves and redeems us and gives us a new nature, a nature that is counter to our inherent and sin nature, are we able to truly and fully know what love is, truly and fully experience love, and truly and fully be able to show love to others.
 - As God transforms us so that our pride and selfishness decrease as our humility and selflessness increase, then we are to be show a true, full, and proper love for others that is not hindered by our pride and selfishness, by what we can gain from them and how we can use them, but a love that is selfless, sacrificial, giving, a love that put their interests and needs above our own.

- And this love that we show is not only for other Christians, but for all.
 - The world understands love that is for those you are connected with (family) and have common interests with (friends and coworkers).
 - But the world fails in its understanding of love for those who are your enemies, those who have wronged you, those you have no connection or common interest with.
 - The world understands being cordial and tolerant and accepting, but having to show them love, that can often take it too far.
 - However, not only here in 1 Thess 3, but countless times through NT, God calls and commands His people to love all peoples, not just those within the family of God.
 - This type of love is not possible outside of God but only God can provide it for us and increase and abound it within us.
- Do you want to have a true and full love? Then it must come from God.
- **(3) God sanctifies His people.**
 - Paul encourages the Thessalonian church that he is praying God continues to “establish your hearts blameless in holiness.”
 - God saves and redeems people not so He can be added as an aspect or compartment to their life, but to radically transform their life.
 - God saves and redeems people, and then continues to move and work in their hearts and lives.
 - God saves and redeems—justification—one time occurrence where God declares us right.
 - God continues to move and work—sanctification—continual process of becoming more mature, holy, and conformed into who God wants us to be.
 - I am grateful that God has justified me, that He has declared me right before Him because without this, I would stand before God one day in judgement and be found guilty on all charges.
 - I am grateful that God sanctifies me, that He continues to move and work within my heart and life because without this, I would stand no chance at making it and persevering to the end.
 - I am not and cannot be strong willed enough . . . I am not and cannot be good enough . . . I am not and cannot be righteous enough . . . I am not and cannot be holy enough . . . I am not and cannot be perfect enough.
 - On my own I am not and cannot be.

- But praise be to God that He is and can be, and that through the sacrifice of His Son and through the indwelling Holy Spirit, God can and does make me strong, good, righteous, holy, and perfect enough.
- Brothers and Sisters, we may not be who we want to be, BUT praise God we are not who we once were.
- Do you want to be accepted by God and hear one day, “Well done, my good and faithful servant?” Then it must come from God.

Challenge/Conclusion

Friends, Christian encouragement matters, both for new and mature Christians, and prayer plays a role, particularly as we pray for God’s direction, His love, and His sanctification in our lives and the lives of others.

As we conclude this morning, during our invitation time and your quiet time this week with God, I want us to pray and ponder this reflection question:

- Main Reflection—How well are you doing at encouraging others (particularly through praying for them) and allowing them to be an encouragement to you?