



Your Faith IS My Concern

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy. So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. (1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5)

My friends, perhaps like me you find yourself so busy, your schedule so full with work and appointments and family activities and sporting events, that often it feels like you're just running from one thing to the next, full speed ahead, no time to think, and no matter how important an issue may be, if it's not occupying the current spot on the schedule, then it's "out of sight and out of mind". As the Apostle Paul and his missionary team travelled from town to town sharing the gospel and establishing congregations, I'm sure they had responsibilities and necessities to take care of that would make any of our heads spin. And how tempting and easy it would have been for Paul to do what he had been called to do: to share the Word of God, begin a new congregation, and then say, "Goodbye." Hands-off, emotions off, move on to the next one. But busy as he was, Christian love would not allow Paul to do anything of the sort.

When persecution and opposition drove him from Thessalonica his heartfelt concern for the Thessalonians not only continued, it intensified. Paul's attitude was not, "Well, I did my part. It's all up to them now. Their faith is their responsibility." Instead, he thought about the Thessalonians constantly, but it wasn't only the Thessalonians that Paul had on his heart and conscience. Elsewhere he describes how he daily faced the pressure of his concern for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:29)!

Paul sincerely desired to return to Thessalonica to personally encourage them in their faith, but the devil, who opposes God's will, somehow kept that from happening. So Paul did the next best thing and send his co-worker, Timothy, to check in on these new Christians because he understood that our faith is under constant attack by the devil, his temptations, and the worldly people he uses to pressure us to give up our faith. That pressure can be particularly intense when someone first comes to faith in the Lord. Then, like a tiny seedling, their faith is very tender and vulnerable to his lies, intriguing false teachings, and rejection by unbelieving friends and family. For that reason Paul repeats again and again how concerned he was for the Thessalonians and how he was

afraid that the persecution that had driven he and his friends out of town might be used by the devil to overwhelm them and render all his ministry and preaching useless.

Dear Christians, we live in a time when faith and all things spiritual are assumed to be entirely personal, where that's my business, not yours. I'm fine. Don't worry about me. But Paul's example encourages us to push back against that indifference in our society with sincere concern. We can and should be passionate about each other's faith because there is nothing that the devil wants more than a bunch of isolated individual Christians or isolated congregations thinking they're all OK so he can put the squeeze on them and snuff them out one at a time. Instead let's encourage one another and "check in" on one another, especially in tough and lonely times.

For when our Lord Jesus returns our joy and crown and glory will be one another—how God has used us to keep one another in the one true faith in Jesus to the very end. Everything else here—the money, the trophies, the degrees, the houses, the cars, the vacations—are all going to be forgotten and gone. Jesus once told the Parable of the Shrewd Manager that taught the same truth (cf. Luke 16:1-9). A negligent manager found out that he was going to be fired soon, yet he used the time, money, and authority that he still had at his disposal to try to win friends for himself by cutting sweetheart deals with his master's debtors. So too God would have us use all that we have and all that we are—our time and money and talents and energy and resources—to win souls for Jesus so that when heaven comes, we will be welcomed into eternal dwellings by those with whom we have shared and whom we have supported with the good news and so been our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

Prayer: Lord God, forgive my indifference for the spiritual welfare of my brothers and sisters in Christ. You have connected me to a family of believers so that I can encourage them and they can support me in our daily walk with Jesus, until by your grace and mercy we all reach home together. Amen.