

Being the People of God: Encouragement

1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

I. Being the people of God is perseverance; 2:13-16.

¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Paul reveals why he is thankful. The Thessalonians have received and accepted the gospel message not as a human message, but as the word of God. Evidence of the Thessalonians' acceptance of the gospel as the word of God was their willingness to suffer for it.

Paul speaks of the wrath as coming on the Jews and all who try to hinder the gospel. It is at the last day that the people of his nation will receive the due reward of their misdeeds. Paul's anger is the anger of a man with his own people. He sorrows at their fate grieving over the effects of their misdeeds.

Thank God continually for those who have responded to the gospel. People still work to hinder the gospel being shared. Are you willing to suffer for the gospel: inconvenience, loss of freedom, loss financially, excluded by friends and family, belittled, motives misrepresented, loss of comfort, and no rest? It will come from your own people.

II. Being the people of God is healthy relationships; 2:17-3:8.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us. ¹⁹ 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? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy. ^{3:1} So when we could stand it no longer, we

thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ² 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, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. ⁷ Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸ For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.

One of the accusations leveled against him had been that he had never intended to revisit Thessalonica and that his failure to return was evidence that he was a con-man. So, Paul addresses them affectionately and goes on to express his sense of loss at their absence from him.

Paul had made a determined attempt to see them. However, Paul's attempts had been blocked by Satan. Satan makes his presence felt to Christians. He even prevents them from doing things they would dearly love to do. The separation from them became unendurable, and thus he took action. He had sent Timothy to encourage them. With the news Timothy brought back there is now reassurance and hope.

Paul lists three points. The first is the news about the faith of the Thessalonians. He expresses his relief now that they have not wavered in maintaining a right attitude to God. The second point is that they had continued in love. The third point is their attitude to Paul. They looked forward with eager longing to a reunion and were just as anxious to see Paul again as he was to see them.

People who look for proof against you will find it somewhere as they have a distorted view of life. Satan is still at work hindering the gospel. Do not give up or get discouraged when it does not go the way you want or the time frame you desire. There is power in warm healthy relationships with those young in the faith. There is great encouragement and power for living in our faith in God and love for each other.

III. Being the people of God is praying for each other; 3:9-13.

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. ¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

His prayer is that he might see them. But when he joins them again, he does not want simply to talk about the weather. He prays that he may supply what is lacking in their faith. He knew that there was much that had yet to be done for them. He prays that they may be blameless. The thought is of blamelessness before God. Paul prays for them to be holy. Believers do not simply live uprightly; they belong to God and thus are set apart entirely for God's service.

The joy that other believers who are growing brings to our lives is amazingly motivating. Pray for other believers: for their love to increase and overflow for each other and everyone else, for any lacking in their faith, and to strengthen their hearts so they can be blameless and holy before God when Jesus comes again with all of heaven.

How much effort are you willing to put into healthy loving relationships with other believers, especially young believers? Like Paul in sending Timothy, we need to care about the spiritual growth and faith of other believers over our comfort and sacrifice for them. Don't give up praying for the desire and passion that God has given you for ministry that is not currently able to happen.