

Stand Fast in the Lord

I Thessalonians 3:1-13

Introduction:

- Many Bible teachers believe that chapter 3 appears to imply that because of Paul's long absence, the Thessalonian began to think he had no concern for their welfare. The objection seems to have been that he fled from them on the slightest danger, and that when the danger was passed, he had not returned, but had left them to bear their afflictions alone. Let us review Acts 17:1-5
- So Paul takes the time to correct this and he mentions how he sent Timothy, and clearly we see Paul's great heart for these people on display in this chapter- v. 5
- The theme of sanctification- which continues to 4:12
- As usual, Paul connects a call to holiness with the coming of the Lord!

I. Timothy's Good Report- v. 1-7

a. The blessing of fellow-laborers

i. In the previous chapter Paul explained how much he wanted to be with the Thessalonians during their time of trial (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). However, since Paul could not be with the Thessalonians himself, he did the next best thing. He sent his trusted companion and fellow worker Timothy to them.

ii. Every ministry needs workers to help to carry the load! There's a work for all to do!

b. Paul's reminder- Appointed unto afflictions- v. 3-4

i. Believers have appointments with affliction/tribulation

1. God allows or ordains them-Matthew 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
2. They are a **normal** part of the Christian life- James 1:2-3
3. You are not alone- I Thessalonians 2

4. God didn't stop loving you, or wanting to use you
 - ii. Some believe that affliction means God is angry at the believer. The truth is that affliction means that God loves us enough to give us what we need to become more like Christ.

Tough Trees

Bristlecone pines are the world's oldest living trees. Several are estimated to be 3,000 to 4,000 years old. In 1957, scientist Edmund Schulman found one he named "Methuselah." This ancient, gnarled pine is nearly 5,000 years old!

Bristlecones grow atop the mountains of the western United States at elevations of 10,000 to 11,000 feet. They've been able to survive some of the harshest living conditions on earth: arctic temperatures, fierce winds, thin air, and little rainfall.

Their brutal environment is actually one of the reasons they've survived for millennia. Hardship has produced extraordinary strength and staying power.

- c. Afflictions are not a consuming fire, but a refining fire to the godly
- II. Stand Fast in the Lord- v. 5-12
- a. Timothy brought great news that they were standing fast in the faith, their hearts were fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and they were looking for His coming.
 - b. A source of joy for preachers- v. 8
 - i. They were still "Standing on the Promises"
 - ii. In Jesus' parable of the soils (Matthew 13:1-23), He described the way that some fall away when tribulation or persecution arises. This often proves who is a genuine believer. The Christian's faith will be tested. Paul knew this, and as a good pastor, he was encouraged that they passed the test!
 - c. I Cor 16:13- Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.
 - d. II Thess. 2:15- Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.
 - e. Stand fast and hold the traditions/doctrines: The command to stand fast implies a location, and this tells us what Christians must stand fast upon. They must keep standing on God's Word!

- f. Col. 1:23, I Corinthians 15:58
 - i. We are not standing fast when we give up ground! If there is a time in your life when you were more faithful, and closer to God than you are now, you have not been standing fast!
 - ii. Like the song says, "Anchored in Jehovah- I shall not be moved!"
- g. Not only through adversity, but through temptations- v. 5
- h. The tempter- Satan
 - i. Satan in the Thessalonian Epistles
 - a. Hinderer- 2:18
 - b. Tempter- 3:5
 - c. Deceiver- II Thess 2:9-10
 - 2. The specific temptation here is to give up!
 - 3. Job's wife said, "Curse God and die!"
 - ii. The greatest temptation is not going to be to run out and do some wild outlandish thing. The greatest temptation is to stop doing those little things that help make us faithful. Stand fast!
- i. The role of prayer- v. 10
 - i. Paul could not be with them- but Paul could pray for them!
 - ii. 1:2, 3:10, 5:17-Constant prayer- We can learn from Paul's example of prayer! What does it say about us as a church when we are not motivated to pray? If more Christians prayed like this, we would see revival in our churches!
 - iii. V. 12- the increase of love: brethren, enemies, all men! God doesn't hate anybody, He despises their sin!

III. The Coming of the Lord With His Saints- v. 13

- a. Impacts our holiness- sanctification- the process of becoming like Christ
 - i. Your hearts blameless in holiness: The heart must be made holy first. The devil is happy to let us develop a holy exterior while neglecting the interior, like whitewashed tombs, full of death (Matthew 23:27).

ii. Complete sanctification- v. 13

1. We may stumble while trying to stand fast. That's okay, just get clean, and begin standing fast again.
2. While we are imperfect in this life, constantly falling and having to come to God for confession of our sins, the day is coming when we will be absolutely perfect and blameless before God.

b. God's timetable for the end times

- i. The Lord is coming *for* his Church at any time. We believe in the imminent, any moment, return of Christ- I Thess 4:13-18. This will be followed by the judgment seat of Christ in heaven and a period of judgment on earth- the Tribulation. At the end of this period Christ is coming back to earth in power and glory *with* his saints to judge the wicked and establish his righteous government on the earth- we call this the Millennial Kingdom.
- ii. We rightly note the difference when Christ comes for his saints at the Rapture, and when He comes with His saints at his 2nd coming to establish his kingdom.

c. The question then is, when will Christians be presented blameless before God? Where does this passage fit in the timeline?

- i. Obviously, we will be presented blameless at the rapture, so what does this passage mean?
- ii. There are 3 key words used in the NT to express the truth of the Lord's return:
 1. Epiphaneia- epiphany or appearing
 2. Apokalupsis- Revelation; unveiling
 3. Used in our text: Parousia-means coming. Can also mean "in the presence of"

iii. So, to refute those who think the Bible teaches a “post-trib” rapture- this passage most likely refers to meeting Christ in the air, but “coming” to Heaven- our arrival in Heaven to be in the presence of the Father! There is a coming to earth, but there is also a coming to Heaven, and what an event that will be!

Conclusion:

- Illustr- “and it came to pass”- afflictions didn’t come to stay, they came to pass! No matter what, we must stand fast!
- Postage stamps are getting more expensive, but they have one attribute that most of us could emulate: they stick to one thing until they get there.
- Stand fast- because one day we will be presented holy before God