
a ***Grace Notes*** course

1 Thessalonians

an expositional study
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Lesson 4

1 Thessalonians 3

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1 Thessalonians 3:1

"Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone..."

Therefore,

The word "therefore" gives a deduction of the gospel team's love for the Thessalonians (2:17-20). Because of his special association with the Thessalonians, Paul sends Timothy to encourage them in their trial.

when we could no longer endure it,

The word "endure" means in this context to hold back. He can no longer bear to leave the Thessalonians alone without help from the team. Unable to go to Thessalonica himself, he sends Timothy. Timothy was Paul's troubleshooter. The church suffered severe persecution so they needed encouragement from someone from the gospel team.

we thought it good to be left in Athens alone

The Thessalonians expelled Paul from Thessalonica and he went to Berea. Later Paul traveled from Berea in northern Greece to Athens in southern Greece alone. He sent word back to Berea for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens (Acts 17:15). Timothy and Silas did join him there.

In spite of his need to have Timothy with him, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage them in their trials (3:3). The Thessalonians did not drive Timothy out of Thessalonica like they drove out Paul and Silas. However, this assignment was a very difficult mission. There is no evidence that Timothy protested against Paul in this task.

Paul could have used the full complement of his gospel team in a city like Athens. However, he chose to forego his need for others. The words "thought it good" means to be well pleased. This speaks to the motivation behind Paul's decision. He did not make this decision grudgingly. He knew it was the right decision based on the well-being of the Thessalonians.

He accepted the responsibility without complaint.

Timothy and Silas left Paul alone in the world centre of philosophical intellectualism, the city of Athens. Philosophers from around the Roman world assembled there. The city was given wholly to idolatry (Acts 17:16). It is always best to operate with teams in this kind of situation. However, loneliness is just one of those hardships a "good soldier of Christ" bears for his people. Paul made no great impact in Athens. He wrote no epistle to the church at Athens. There is no record of any conversions in that city. Evidently, he did not penetrate that city with the gospel.

Paul moved from Athens to Corinth after Timothy left for Thessalonica. There he formed a church and wrote two epistles to the church there. Timothy later joined Paul in Corinth.

Principle

Ministry involves deep commitment to the people we serve.

Application

Self-denial deprives the self of personal comfort for the sake of others. Ministry involves valuing the people to whom we minister to the point of self-denial.

1 Thessalonians 3:2

"...and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith..."

and sent Timothy,

Paul personally sent Timothy giving him the endorsement he needed to minister while in Thessalonica. If Paul could trust the credibility of Timothy, the Thessalonians could as well. Paul draws attention to three qualifications of Timothy to minister to the Thessalonians. He was the right man for the right job. He was the kind of man who could adjust to any situation.

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Note how Paul views Timothy's ministry to the Corinthians:

"For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

"Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Corinthians 16:10).

Principle

Effective ministry requires a selfless attitude.

Application

Many people in ministry are out for what they can get. They seek their own ends. They feather their own nest. This is an indictment against believers of our day as well.

"And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them..." (Jeremiah 45:5).

A temptation of many today is to use ministry to advance their career. They want to be a big shot in the kingdom. We tread on dangerous ground here. God will by-pass people like this.

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:19-21).

our brother

First, Paul calls Timothy "brother." "Brother" is one who has entered the family of God. "Brother" seems to indicate equivalence in ministry with Paul. Elsewhere Paul calls Timothy his "son" because he was younger than Paul. Paul honors Timothy for ministry purposes. Respect is important in ministry so Paul recommends him for ministry.

"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem

them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Paul and Timothy were poles apart in age, in educational background and in nationality [Timothy was half-Gentile and half-Jew]. Paul had extensive formal training while there is no evidence that Timothy had any. Yet, God united these men in ministry.

and minister of God,

Secondly, Timothy is God's minister. He is not primarily Paul's associate minister. Paul does not claim Timothy as exclusively his. Timothy represents, not Paul, but God.

"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:15-16).

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" (Colossians 1: 24-26).

and our fellow laborer

Thirdly, Paul calls Timothy a "fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ." A "fellow laborer" is someone who works together with someone else (Romans 16:3,9,21; Philippians 2:25; 4:3; Philemon 1,24). It takes co-operation to advance the cause of Christ. Timothy was a team player. He was no prima donna who sought the limelight. He sought no privileged treatment for himself. He served on the evangelistic gospel team with a great sense of teamwork.

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"Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you" (Romans 16:21).

"...and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me" (Colossians 4:11).

Principle

God needs brothers, ministers and laborers for His kingdom.

Application

The church of Jesus Christ needs workers. This seems to be a forbidden concept these days. Thank God there are those who are willing to give themselves to advance the cause of Christ throughout the world. If more people would get under the load, the job would be lighter. Will you allow Jesus Christ to harness you for His work?

in the gospel of Christ,

Paul views himself as a "fellow laborer" in the harvest fields. He also views Timothy the same way. He is a "fellow" minister with Paul. Paul does not look upon Timothy as competition. He is one with him in ministry. He gave glory to Jesus Christ to whom the glory belongs. We capitulate to Him in everything. In all work for Jesus Christ, He is Lord.

Principle

Proclaiming the gospel requires freedom from competition.

Application

Christians who capitulate to the cause of Christ, do not look on others with a sense of competition. They cheer others in their efforts to share Christ with others.

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

The Lord opens doors of opportunity to share the gospel.

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord..." (2 Corinthians 2:12).

Part of the Christian armor is to be prepared to proclaim the gospel.

"...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace..." (Ephesians 6:15).

Timothy receives his marching orders. Paul asks Timothy to walk all the way from Athens in southern Greece back to Thessalonica three hundred miles to the north and then from Thessalonica to Corinth, which was south of Athens.

to establish you

Timothy's task was twofold: 1) to establish and 2) to encourage the Thessalonians. They needed confirmation and comfort in the Christian faith. They needed someone to come in to stabilize the situation. When churches become unsettled, they always need someone like Timothy.

The word "establish" means fix (firmly), make fast, set, support. It carries the ideas of confirm, strengthen. In 12 of the 14 times this word occurs in the New Testament, it refers to strengthening people in the faith. Timothy was in the business of making the Thessalonians stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in their convictions and attitudes. The faith of the Thessalonian church was at stake. Timothy was to make them strong in their faith. He was to help them set their faith fast.

"You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8).

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

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"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God" (Revelation 3:2).

Principle

All Christians need spiritual stability.

Application

Man is inherently unstable. Sin is at the root of instability. That is why some oscillate in their convictions. If people do not know the Bible, any wind of doctrine will sweep them away. They become vulnerable to false teaching.

Christians need to set their faith fast like a deep cement foundation for a skyscraper. It can bear up under any pressure that may come its way.

and encourage you

The second mission of Timothy was to "encourage" the Thessalonians. The word "encouraged" connotes to cause someone to be consoled, either by verbal or non-verbal means. This is more than saying sweet things to fellow Christians. It is giving them strength in their faith to form principles for spiritual living.

Paul and his team left Thessalonica about a year before he wrote this epistle. During the course of that year, the Thessalonians martyred some believers for their faith. Others endured persecution for their faith.

Principle

Encouragement comes from forming biblical principles for life.

Application

Courage does not come from saying sweet things to each other. It comes from promises and principles taken from God's Word.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of

all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation" (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

concerning your faith

The word "concerning" is literally on behalf of. Paul sent Timothy to establish and encourage the Thessalonians on behalf of their faith. Faith under trial needs both stability and encouragement.

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:21-22).

The centre of spiritual stability is our faith. A weak faith triggers instability. Faith that does not rest in the proper object always detracts from the Christian life. Those weak in faith panic when things go wrong.

"...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Ephesians 6:16).

Five times in the next few verses, Paul refers to the faith of the Thessalonians (vv.5,6,7,10).

"For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Colossians 2:5).

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"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit..." (Jude 1:20).

Principle

Applying the principles of God's Word to our experience strengthens our faith.

Application

We strengthen our faith by the Word of God.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Christians must fight for their faith.

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12).

It is imperative that church leaders strengthen congregations in the faith.

"So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

1 Thessalonians 3:3

"...that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this"

that

The word "that" gives us the goal of Timothy's trip: establishing and encouraging the Thessalonians.

no one should be shaken by these afflictions;

The words "no one" indicate that it is Paul's desire that not even one believer's faith be set back by "these afflictions." There was the greatest urgency that their faith be bolstered by Timothy's coming lest even one wavering believer be moved in the midst of these afflictions.

The word "shaken" is a graphic term. The word means literally to wag as of a dog wagging his tail while fawning or cringing. "Shaken" carries the idea of to unsettle like a dog's tail going back and forth. The Thessalonian Christians should not allow themselves to be shaken or unsettled by persecution. False teaching can disturb our souls. Some of them were so emotionally disturbed that they gave up their beliefs. Christians who are mature in their faith will not move from their moorings. Mature believers do not push the panic button.

"Afflictions" means pressure. It is anything that loads the soul. This trouble comes from direct suffering. It was an occupational hazard to become a Christian in those days. There was the awful danger that the Thessalonians would be enticed by the pleasant prospect of the easier life afforded by compromise or reverting to paganism. No doubt, there were plenty of smooth sympathizers on hand encouraging them to make just such a fatal move.

Principle

Mature believers know how to endure affliction.

Application

All Christians face pressure and duress in their lives. The issue is whether we suffer like a mature Christian or like an immature Christian. Tribulations should never throw a mature believer off course. God provides for the believer in such a way that he can have peace in the pressures of life. The mature Christian rests in that.

If you are in that cycle of your Christian life where everything is resulting in affliction, reverses or trouble, God knows how much you can bear and will not allow the pressure to become too great. The Lord is very careful how He measures out the pain that comes to your life. You can trust Him for that.

for

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The word "for" establishes the reason why duress should not shake the faith of believers: this is in God's divine design for them.

you yourselves know

The Thessalonians knew they would face tribulation because Paul told them when he was in Thessalonica that they would face it (3:4). Paul leveled with them that they would meet such things if they became Christians. He never misrepresented the difficulty in becoming a Christian. He never painted a rosy picture of a bed of ease. The Christian life demands confrontation. True Christianity is not convenient. The brand of Christianity in the first century cost something.

that we are appointed to this

We can translate the word "appointed" by the word "ordained." God ordains us to affliction. When people become Christians, they receive a new kind of trouble. Affliction is God's appointment for us. God places affliction strategically in our lives for our personal growth. This is God's destiny for us that comes by His divine design.

Affliction is God's appointment for us. Trial is no accident. We can clearly see the folly of trying to evade persecutions. This was the appointed path of the Thessalonians. The word "appointed" here does not refer to past eternity but to present time. The Christian life being what it is and the godless world being what it is, makes afflictions and persecution certain. God says, "I have an appointment for you with affliction." We make appointments regularly. This is an appointment that I would prefer not to keep!

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me" (Philippians 1:29-30).

"For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently,

this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps..." (1 Peter 2:20-21).

Principle

Affliction is in the plan and will of God for the believer.

Application

Some of us might say, "What did I ever do to deserve this pain in my life. What did I do wrong?" It may be that you did not do anything wrong. This is just one of the by-products of being the child of the King. You say, "I don't like these side-effects of Christianity." A disciple is someone under discipline. God appoints trial into our lives so that we will become more disciplined in the things of God. (1 Peter 4:19).

1 Thessalonians 3:4

"For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know"

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you

Paul says he kept on telling them when he was with them about the persecution to come [imperfect tense]. He taught this repeatedly. Paul says, "Do you remember when I was there a year ago? I warned you of coming trouble."

that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know

The words "suffer tribulation" refers to suffering due to the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of others (2 Thessalonians 1:6,7). This pressure from without hems the believer in a situation like a mountain gorge. God puts conditions in our narrow way and presses us into distressing problems.

"We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair..." (2 Corinthians 4:8).

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God puts us into a squeeze play. Compression produces gold and compression produces character in the Christian life.

Christian suffering is a part of the Christian life. Christians face different kinds of affliction: persecution (1:6), imprisonment (Acts 20:23), derision (Hebrews 10:33), poverty (2 Corinthians 5:13), sickness (Revelation 2:22), and inner distress (Philippians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 7:5).

Tribulation tests whether we will spread the gospel at the risk of life or limb and whether we will claim the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). Faith accepts God's discipline and patiently endures trial (2 Thessalonians 1:4). A Christian has the assurance that the coming glory far overshadows present suffering (2 Corinthians 4:17,18). God's promises give us hope in the face of suffering.

Principle

The mature Christian does not give up when things get tough.

Application

It comes as a great shock to some Christians when trials come their way. Although God plans divine duress in the lives of Christians, they can have a sense of God's presence with them through it.

Christians can have a sense of peace in the midst of trouble. We can have stability during any pressure that comes our way. Christians have the equipment to be stable at all times, in good times or bad.

The mature Christian does not give up when the going gets tough. Most people cave in to trouble. They give up by resorting to booze or drugs. They cannot look pain in the face so they use some form of escapism. They will pay the piper for this. The mature Christian, however, knows how to cope with duress.

"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Romans 12:12).

Mature Christians glory in tribulation because they know that it is God's design for their lives.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

God gives grace to the person who knows how to draw on that grace.

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

1 Thessalonians 3:5

"For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain"

For this reason,

The reason Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica was the subtlety of Satan in discouraging the new church.

when I could no longer endure it,

The word "endure" means to protect, or preserve by covering. It carries the idea of keeping off something that threatens – to bear up against or hold out against something. Paul was troubled that he didn't know the true spiritual condition of the Thessalonians.

"If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:12).

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Because Paul was certain that persecutions were inevitable and had befallen the Thessalonians, he was deeply concerned about their spiritual welfare. He could no longer bear the suspense so he sent to obtain firsthand knowledge of the condition of their faith. He wanted to assure himself that the Tempter had not won them over by his enticements.

I sent to know your faith,

Paul wanted to know the spiritual state of the Thessalonian Christians. "Were they walking with the Lord or were they caving in to pressure?" "Did they have any faith?"

lest by some means the tempter had tempted you,

The Bible refers to the Devil as "tempter" twice -- here and in the temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-3) where the Devil tries to lure Jesus into moving away from God's plan.

The Devil uses persecution to discourage Christians from living dynamic Christian lives. The "tempter" will destroy them by guile. Satan will slant their minds against God's will. He does not use honorable strategies like Christians. Christians limit themselves to systems that are biblical and legitimate. The Devil uses strategies consistent with his character.

"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Cf also 1 Timothy 2:14

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who

deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9).

Principle

The church persecuted is the church purified. Satan will use his wiles to deceive us.

Application

The church of Christ is filled with fakers and phonies. People need to examine themselves as to whether they are genuine Christians.

"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

No doubt all phonies will throw in the towel quickly. Persecution always sorts out the fakers. The church popular is the church polluted. The church persecuted is the church purified. If the church receives nothing but favor from the world system then there is something wrong with the church. The world hates the church when it finds out what the church believes.

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

The Devil will take advantage of your vulnerability. He knows about your history. He knows where he can stick it to you.

Temptation is an awful thing particularly when both Satan and your sin capacity join forces against you. At times, Satan will move into your family and create problems in your household. He hates harmonious Christian homes. He may, for example, attempt to invade the bedroom.

"Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come

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together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Satan loves misunderstanding, unkindness and thoughtlessness. He wants couples to take each other for granted. He wants them to misuse sex. He delights to see physical and emotional bonds broken and partners drift apart. The Devil may bring a third person onto the scene which can result in cheating, infidelity, and eventual divorce.

1 Thessalonians 3:6

"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you..."

But now

Paul now contrasts his apprehension about the state of Thessalonian spirituality with the good report of Timothy.

that Timothy has come to us from you,

Timothy has now made it back from Thessalonica to southern Greece (Acts 18:5). He is now in Corinth with Paul and gives his report on the state of the faith of the church in Thessalonica. Paul knew of their saving faith but he did not know the level of their sustaining faith. Our sustaining faith is the faith whereby we walk before the Lord. That feature of faith differs in every believer. Some believers do not build their faith. They genuinely know the Lord but they do not know Him very well. Sustaining faith is progressive.

Principle

Sustaining faith is the secret of weathering the storms of life.

Application

Sustaining faith is progressive in its development. We can nurture faith so that it becomes robust. We can move from pre-school to kindergarten in our faith. Then we move

from kindergarten to grade school and from grade school to high school. Eventually, we graduate from the graduate school of faith. Anywhere along the line, Satan can stymie our faith. We might hit a plateau and stay at that plateau for years. We call this a case of arrested spiritual expansion. This is spiritual malfunction.

If we do not advance in our faith, we move into a stagnant stage of our Christian life. The Devil will do anything in his diabolical power to get Christians into this state. He will try to alienate believers from the Bible -- the source of their faith.

and brought us good news of your faith and love,

Two characteristic attitudes of the Thessalonians were their faith and love toward the gospel team. They loved the gospel and the ministers of the gospel. Timothy's report sounded like the gospel -- "good news." The New Testament often links the qualities of "faith and love" together. Faith precedes love. The order is important. Faith is vertical and love is horizontal.

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints..." (Corinthians 1:3-4).

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4).

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one

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of you all abounds toward each other..." (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

and that you always have good remembrance of us,

It is encouraging for Paul to know that the Thessalonians look back on his visit with fond memories. Paul says, "You understood why I had to leave Thessalonica. It was not because I wanted to leave you. I left under duress. Thanks for your understanding."

greatly desiring to see us,

The word "desiring" means to long for greatly, to yearn after. This desiring recognizes that there is a need for fellowship between the Thessalonians and Paul.

The Thessalonians had cherished memories of the gospel team. Note how the New Testament uses the Greek word for "greatly desiring:"

"For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while" (Romans 15:22-24).

"Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more."

"So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

"I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1: 3-5).

as we also to see you

The desire of the gospel team is reciprocal to the Thessalonians'. They felt the pain of enforced separation just as much as Paul desired to see them. There is a mutual love between the gospel team and the Thessalonians. It is always encouraging to a father's heart to know that his children walk according to the principles of the family.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

In spite of intense persecution, the Thessalonians remained true to the Lord. There is a point where we have to release those who follow us to the Lord. We must cut the apron strings at some point. It is arrogance to think that people cannot get along spiritually without us.

Principle

Dynamic faith produces mutual love.

Application

Dynamic faith produces mutual love. The closest fellowship that believers share is fellowship in the gospel. There is a special love among those who go shoulder to shoulder sharing the good news of the gospel.

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it

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<p>until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:3-8).</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 3:7</p> <p>"...therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith"</p> <p>Verses seven through nine give Paul's response to Timothy's report.</p> <p>therefore,</p> <p>The "therefore" draws an inference from verse six.</p> <p>brethren,</p> <p>Paul appeals to the common heritage in Christ that he had with the Thessalonians.</p> <p>in all our affliction and distress</p> <p>"Affliction" refers to the pressure and tribulation Paul received from hostile people. As Paul writes First Thessalonians, he is in Corinth facing more problems.</p> <p>"When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles'" (Acts 18:5-6).</p> <p>The word "distress" denotes a necessity, calamity or pressure imposed by either inner pressure or external circumstances. Distress refers to the pressure, constraint or necessity of circumstances Paul faced while writing First Thessalonians in Corinth.</p> <p>we were comforted concerning you by your faith</p>	<p>Timothy's report brought satisfaction to the souls of the gospel team when they saw the dynamics of the faith of the Thessalonians. The discovery of the sound state of the faith of the Thessalonians made all the difference in the world to Paul. Their faith encouraged Paul. He received renewed spiritual strength when he heard of their healthy spiritual state. This fortified him against pressing distress and crushing affliction he was currently encountering.</p> <p>In view of this good news, Paul could now move on without the deep concern he had about the church at Thessalonica.</p> <p>Principle</p> <p>The test of our spiritual character is opposition.</p> <p>Application</p> <p>The test of Christian character is opposition. If everything goes our way without opposition, that demonstrates nothing about the quality of our character. How we react to opposition is the real test. Do we loose our cool? Such tests are frequent in the local church. The more people, the more differences of opinion. God sends sharp experiences into our life to test the level of our spirituality. Do we have a dynamic faith that can go beyond the rejection and hostility of other people?</p> <p>The joy of hearing of the spiritual success of those we lead to Christ always encourages us to bear up under distress in ministry. This always renews our commitment to serve in the face of difficulty.</p> <p>No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself within the sphere of Christian ministry. When fellow servants within our purview have ups, their ups are our ups. When they encounter downs, their downs are our downs. We weep with them that weep, mourn with them that mourn and rejoice with them that rejoice.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 3:8</p> <p>"For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord".</p>

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For now

Now, under the state of affairs of seeing the vigorous faith of the Thessalonians, the gospel team engenders a certain outcome -- spiritual animation in the form of encouragement.

we live,

The news of the vitality of the faith of the Thessalonians put life and vigor in Paul's own ministry. This was a further catalyst to Paul's future ministry.

if you stand fast in the Lord

The condition for the flourishing and reviving of Paul's ministry is the Thessalonian steadfastness in the Lord. The words "stand fast" carried the idea of standing firm. Standing in the Lord gives sustaining power.

Standing also carries the idea of standing on guard against falling. It is Paul's heart to see the Thessalonians stabilized under pressure.

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

Principle

Stability comes from the Lord, not self.

Application

God often puts cheer into our hearts just at the time we need it. When life seems dark, God puts someone or something into our lives to encourage us. In view of this encouraging word, we can move on to further challenges.

We cannot allow people to move us off our spiritual moorings. If we keep our eyes on the Lord, that is 20/20 vision. Things will get blurry if we try to focus on people.

Christians stand firm because of God's promises.

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness..." (Ephesians 6:13-14).

Standing in faith is standing in the Lord. Faith looks to the Lord and the Lord gives us the strength to move on.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Philippians 1:27).

"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1).

1 Thessalonians 3:9

"For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God..."

For what thanks

Paul asks a rhetorical question. What adequate thanks can Paul offer to God for the blessing he received from Timothy's report? He knows that all credit goes to the Lord. He feels totally incapable of giving thanks to God in a manner that would do justice to the way God worked in the lives of the Thessalonians.

can we render to God for you,

The word "render" has the idea of to give back as an equivalent, to requite, recompense. It has the idea of a complete return. Paul wants to give a complete return of thanks to God for the Thessalonian Christians. Paul owes God an obligation for bringing the Thessalonians into his life. How can we return God's goodness to us? He was a man of gratitude to God.

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"What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12).

Paul knows that he played a role in the lives of the Thessalonians but he also knows that it was God who did the essential work.

for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God

True joy comes from true values. Paul was full of joy because of what God did in the lives of the Thessalonians.

The word "before" in the phrase "before our God" has the sense of Paul rejoicing in the presence of God. He is the source of all blessing. God did the doing so God gets the glory. Paul's joy endures God's penetrating eye. His joy stood in the presence of God. Paul's joy is before God and his thanksgiving is to Him. God is the ultimate author of spiritual victories and joy. He is the One to whom gratitude is due.

Principle

God does the doing so God gets the glory.

Application

Christian workers need to be careful that they do not view their ministries as their personal success. We must give God the glory for His work among our people. We need to get a perspective on our role in the scheme of eternal things. None of us can adequately thank God for how He uses us.

1 Thessalonians 3:10

"...night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?"

night and day

Paul and his partners prayed for the Thessalonians night and day. The team offered consistent prayer for these people, believing that God would answer their prayers. The Thessalonians were hardly ever out of their prayers.

praying exceedingly

The word "praying" means to desire, to long for. Paul asks with a sense of urgency that he might see the Thessalonians face to face. "Exceedingly" is a double compound word emphasizing the intensity of the prayers of the gospel team. Paul's prayer was fervent prayer. The word "exceedingly" expresses strong praying – superabundant praying. He prayed beyond normal measure for this request. This is extraordinary prayer over what one would normally pray. Paul prayed with extensive earnestness.

Principle

Some situations need extraordinary, superabundant praying.

Application

Have you ever entered extraordinary, superabundant praying? If not, try it. Carve out extra time for this special need in your life or the life of someone else and pray "exceedingly."

that we may see your face

Paul made five requests for the Thessalonians:

1) to see the Thessalonians face to face, 2) to complete what is lacking in their faith, 3) to deliver them from Satan's obstruction, 4) that their love might enlarge to others, 5) to establish their hearts unblameable in holiness.

Paul's first request in his extraordinary prayer was that he might see the Thessalonians in person

and perfect

The second request Paul made in prayer was that he might have the opportunity to "perfect" the faith of the church in Thessalonica. The word "perfect" means to make fit, to equip, prepare, to render complete, to furnish completely, put in order, restore. "Perfect" comes from two Greek words: down and to mend or repair. Secular Greek used the term "perfect" for setting bones, and for manning a fleet or outfitting an army so they would be thoroughly prepared to go to war. The New

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Testament uses this word for mending fishing nets (Mark 1:19).

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." (Ephesians 4:11-12).

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

"Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction" (2 Corinthians 13:10).

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

Principle

Our faith needs development.

Application

It is one thing to express faith in the Lord Jesus' death on the cross for salvation but it is another thing to grow in that faith. Are you growing in your faith? Is your level of faith the same it was the day you became a Christian?

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1-3).

"...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

We grow as we apply the principles of God's Word to our experience. We move from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood, into maturity. Certain spiritual childhood diseases will infect our Christian lives if we do not mature in our faith. Many new Christians operate on their emotions and move into pseudo-spiritual experiences that have no basis in biblical truth.

what is lacking in your faith

"Lacking" means want, deficiency. Timothy's trip to Thessalonica found some deficiency or shortcoming in the faith of the Thessalonians. There was an area of faith that the gospel team was not able yet to impart to the Thessalonians. Christians never reach a point of absolute completion of their faith. If we stop growing then we plateau in our walk with the Lord.

The word "faith" isolates the area where they needed equipping. Christians need constant development in their knowledge of God's Word, its formation into principles and application to experience. This is how we exercise our faith.

Principle

All Christians have some areas where they need to grow.

Application

There is no place of perfection here on this earth. We should not pray to be free from problems but that God would show us how to cope with problems. We should pray that we would equip our faith to meet whatever problem we might face.

There is always more ground to possess spiritually. We all have serious deficiencies that prevent us from obtaining a well-rounded faith.

Paul prayed many years after he became a Christian that he would grow in his walk with the Lord.

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"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Philippians 3:12-15).

1 Thessalonians 3:11

"Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you"

Paul lifts up a prayer of invocation for the Thessalonians in verses 11-13 to close his burden of verse 10. He makes this intercession to both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now may our God and Father Himself,

Paul not only calls God "God" but he also calls him "Father." The attitude of Paul's approach to prayer is to look to God as Father. Like a son to a father, he presents his prayers to the Lord.

The mood of the Greek word here expresses a wish [optative]. Paul does not know how God will answer his prayer. He expresses his prayer in the form of a desire to leave himself open to God's will.

The word "Himself" is very emphatic in the Greek. Answered prayer always comes within God's sovereignty. The more we recognize our finiteness, the more we place ourselves into God's hands. It is the Father Himself who must undertake for us. Only an omnipotent God and a concerned Father can remove Satan's roadblocks and shelter us from his attacks.

and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul in addition appeals to the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer. Note how Paul

naturally associates the Lord Jesus Christ on the same plane as God the Father. Both the Father and the Son are equally God. Both equally participate in answering prayer.

This sentence has two subjects [the Father and Lord Jesus Christ] and one verb [direct] showing the unity of the Father and Son as one in essence. Not only does the Lord Jesus Christ share the same position as the Father but He also joins the same work as the Father.

Principle

The more we orient to God, the more we cast ourselves upon His sovereign providence for guidance in our lives.

Application

God providentially orders all events of the universe. Therefore, He can change circumstances in answer to prayer. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring but God does. The only certainty we have is that God is in control of everything. He providentially manages the universe. He cares about us and about our future.

The opposite of trusting the Lord is anxiety or worry. Anxiety never resolves anything. If anything, anxiety compounds our problems. Worry will not heal cancer or pay our bills. It might give us ulcers, however. Living by faith means we put our problems in God's providential hands. We commit ourselves to Him.

Christians do not depend on chance or luck to make their way through life. Non-Christians must go it alone. They sweat it out and hope that by chance it will work out for the best. That is why some people sublimates with booze and drugs. They need something or they will go crazy. They are not satisfied with their lot in life. They are never satisfied with their salary or their investments. They know life is short so they are afraid of getting old. They must bear surgery, disease and undertakers by themselves. They escape into pleasure and

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amusements. The Christian trusts in the providence of God.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

direct our way to you.

The word "direct" comes from two words: down and straight. "Direct" literally means to make straight, lead, set right, guide aright. Paul prays that God would direct a straight path back to Thessalonica.

In his second book to the Thessalonians, Paul asks God to lead their hearts to love for God and patient waiting for the Rapture.

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

Believers need God's direction in ministry. Paul prayed for open doors so that God would direct him to certain situations. Paul placed his plans into the hands of God because he knew that he was incapable of managing his ministry by himself.

Paul sees God as managing the universe. If God sovereignly supervises events and people, then Paul can place his life into the hands of a sovereign God. This is what it means to have faith. We place faith in God's management of the universe. We do not have to know the future; we only have to know the One who does.

"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8).

"Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5).

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way" (Psalm 37:23).

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

On the basis of the book of Acts (chapter 17; 18:18, 19:10; 20:31), Paul did not return to Thessalonica for at least five years. God finally answered his prayer in Acts 20:1.

"After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia [province where the city of Thessalonica was located]" (Acts 20:1).

God does not give us immediate answers to our prayers. Only He knows His plan. God does not work by our plan.

Principle

We cannot dictate to God our plan.

Application

God orders our steps and stops. At times He gives us the green light, at times the caution and yet at other times the red light. If we run God's red lights, we might have a calamity. We obey God's signals so that we know for sure His direction for our lives.

We must pray that God will direct our ways and open doors.

"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9).

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord..." (2 Corinthians 2:12).

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: 'I know your works. See, I have

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set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name"" (Revelation 3:7-8).

We cannot trust ourselves when it comes to the will of God. The Devil has many clever counterfeits of God's will. He loves to imitate God's plan.

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you" (Romans 1:9-10).

We cannot make our plans and expect God to bless them. We need God's guidance. We get our marching orders from God's Word. Therefore, we must know the principles of God's Word if we are going to know His will.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you..."

And may the Lord make you increase and abound

The phrase "make you increase" means to make to abound, to superabound. The word carries the idea of multiplying. Paul prays that Thessalonian love will come in abundance by multiplying. The Lord is the source of multiplying love. A love that increases is a stronger love this year than last year.

The second word "abound" means to be superabundant. Christians are to love each other in an extraordinary way. Christians love in a different way than non-Christians love each other. God expects Christians to excel in love. Mature Christians love more than in the expected way. Their love is a surpassing love. Love that is full to the brim is one thing. Love that overflows the container is another. People get the over-flow of our love.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment..." (Philippians 1:9).

The combination of these words for superabundance reinforces the intensity of Christian love.

in love to one another

Not all Christians love one another. Anyone can love the loveable. It is more difficult to love cantankerous and challenging people. There is little credit for loving the lovely. When we love the unlovely, that is a different issue.

"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

and to all,

Christians should not restrict their love simply to one another. It should reach out to those who do not know Christ.

just as we do to you

Paul and his team claim to be models of love. Just as they loved the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians are to love one another.

Principle

The more we are beloved the more we should love.

Application

God requires mutual love between Christians and a love that extends beyond the Christian community. The Lord gives us the capacity to love one another. We cannot take a seminar on Christian love. This love comes from God. The Lord has to do it in us.

True love tells the truth, not half truths. We do not say things about each other that are half-true, or, as the case may be, half false. We do not spread gossip about one another. It grieves

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the heart of God to watch believers fighting with each other.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

"These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:17).

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.... And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:12-13).

"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

Some of us cannot even love our relatives much less our enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43-45).

1 Thessalonians 3:13

"...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"

so that

Paul's aim is that the Lord might strengthen the Thessalonians in practical holiness. Abounding love produces stability in the Christian community.

He may establish your hearts

The word "establish" means to support. God wants to fix hearts and make them secure in His love. God is in the business of making our hearts firm and strong in the faith. Our hearts need stability.

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-22).

"So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Romans 1:11-12).

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

blameless in holiness

To be "blameless" is not sinlessness. "Blameless" means to be free from all valid charge. A blameless person deals with any wrong in his or her life. This person does not cover sin. He or she keeps short accounts with the Lord. When it comes to holiness, it is God's aim that we will be free from censure.

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"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

before our God and Father

The word "before" means that Christians will give account in the presence of God the Father at the Rapture. He will scrutinize our lives in unadulterated truth.

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

The word "coming" means arrival. At the arrival of Christ [the Rapture], God will evaluate us in His very presence. When we stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will stand there blameless because of the cross of Christ. Sin will not be an issue there. The issue is reward.

with all His saints

All Christians will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The word "His" indicates that God will claim us as His own at that judgment. A "saint" is someone set apart unto God as His own.

Principle

Love becomes more stable as we exercise His love in us.

Application

The more we grow in God's love, our love grows stronger and more established. God does not call upon us to love in our own anemic love. God loves through us with His love, not human love.

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).

We do not have to manufacture love. All we have to do is hook up with God's love. When we do this, we will live in blameless holiness.