

Strength in Pain 1st Thessalonians 3:6-13

Tease: We have all heard the old adage “No Pain – No Gain.” There is a certain amount of truth to that adage. We have to exercise to build up strength which often causes pain. Join us tomorrow at Friendship Grace Brethren Church as Pastor Rich explores how the Thessalonians gained strength through pain. Sunday School at 9 am Worship at 10 am. Join us in person or online at FriendshipGraceBrethren.com

Strength in Pain 1st Thessalonians 3:6-13

We continue this morning in our study of 1st Thessalonians. We are in the middle of chapter 3. Two weeks ago when we went through the first 5 verse of chapter 3 where we saw the Apostle Paul go through his concerns for the people in the church in Thessalonika and the troubles they would face. This morning we see Paul with excitement at how the church is developing in spite of the pain they experience. So let’s dig into our text this morning.

1 Thessalonians 3:6 (ESV)

6But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—

Paul begins this paragraph with “But” setting up a contrast with what was said previously. The church in Thessalonica had been through significant trials and difficulty, beginning with the founders of the church being run out of town after only three weeks. After being run out of town and being separated from the rest of his staff in Athens, Paul finally was reunited with Timothy and Silas. He sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to continue teaching and leading the new young church. Now, here in verse 6, Timothy is returning to the Apostle Paul. We do not know what time period elapsed for Timothy in Thessalonica, but I do not get the sense that it was very long. Long enough for Timothy to get a real sense of the maturity of the people but it did not appear to be a really long time. Timothy is bringing to Paul good news about how the people in Thessalonica are growing and serving.

Paul said Timothy brought good news concerning 4 areas.

1. Their Faith
2. Their Love
3. Their Memory of Paul
4. Their Desire to See Paul Again

These areas are more than just simple things, these are actually indicative of a growing Christian.

Faith here is a reference to the body of what they believe. In our vernacular, it would be the same as their theological system or even their statement of faith. Remember they did not yet have

the New Testament to guide them. They had the Hebrew and Greek translation of the Old Testament. They had to rely on what they were being taught by Paul when he was with them and then Timothy when he returned. For Paul to hear that their theology was sound and not filled with false teaching brought to Paul a great deal of comfort and confidence. The reality that they remained strong and sure in their theology and had not been influenced by the prolific false teachers impacting many early churches. This is a compliment to Paul and Timothy and their teaching. But it is also a compliment for the people and their focus on the truth taught by Paul and Timothy.

The reference to their “love” is not simple love but is more of a description of the outworking of their relationship with God because of their theology toward others. They were demonstrating the way that the world knows we are followers of Jesus by how we love each other. Paul was pleased that they had strong proper theology and they demonstrated that by how they loved each other.

Paul was also excited to hear that the church had good memories of Paul. You have to think about this in historical context. Paul was only with them for three weeks and then had to flee for his life. It is not hard to imagine that Paul could have thought that the people did not think much about him running and fleeing when things got difficult. The superficial person may have held it against Paul that he left and they had to remain facing the struggle. Paul was pleased that the people of the church did not

hold it against him but remember him with kindness. Not only did they remember him with kindness they also longed to see him again. In fact they wanted to see Paul again as much as he wanted to see them.

1 Thessalonians 3:7–8 (ESV)

7for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

8For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.

For all the reasons we just went through in verse 6, Paul was comforted by the report from Timothy. Paul was in prison and distress and needed support and comfort. What I find fascinating about this verse is easily missed. What comforted Paul the most was the faith of the people in Thessalonica. Not their love, not their remembering of Paul but their faith. Their theology and how that theology is demonstrated in their everyday life. You know what that is? That is **Learning and Living God's Word!** Paul focused on the fact that the people were sticking to what they had been taught and were living it out in their daily lives. That is the most important thing to preachers. That their congregation learns the Word of God and live it out in their life.

In verse 8 Paul gives us a sense of how important it was for him to hear they were learning and living God's word. The reality that they were learning and living God's Word put Paul and cloud nine. It is like he was saying "now we are really living" since we know that the people are doing well in following God.

1 Thessalonians 3:9–10 (ESV)

9For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,

10as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

Paul is so excited by what he heard from Timothy that he asked: "how can I thank God enough." The difficulty that the church in Thessalonica had gone through from its very founding resulted in strong, consistent, followers of Jesus.

James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote in his Epistle that we should count it a joy when we face trials of all kinds because those trials produce long lasting, persistent faith and maturity. The church in Thessalonica lived that and proved what James said is true and it thrilled Paul that they faced the trials and struggles of being a follower of Jesus and did it so well. He could not praise God enough for it.

This section of text reinforces what I have been saying for a long time and have come to question in recent months as we faced struggles and we see our numbers low. I have to admit that the struggles of the last few months have caused me to doubt what we are doing here. But then to come back to this passage and to see what Paul thinks is important is exactly what we are doing here. Paul's focus on proper deep teaching and the Thessalonian's response to that teaching is exactly what we are doing here. We teach the entire council of the Word of God. We hold the authority of the Word of God to be the highest, and we act on what we have learned.

Paul taught from the very beginning full theology and understanding of God and His direction for us. He taught that there would be struggles and even persecution. He taught that we need to live through it demonstrating that we are followers of Jesus. That is what we do here. I am still frustrated at our loss of people and our negative growth lately. We need to be busy about inviting people and reaching out to friends and neighbors to bring them to church. We need to be busy about sharing the gospel with people around us. We need to be concerned about people dying and going to hell. That is the focus that Paul had in his teaching and needs to be our focus as well.

In verse 10 we see that Paul recognized that the job was not complete. Sure he was thrilled and excited that they were doing so well, but there was still work to do. So he was longing to be with them and teaching them again.

Last week as Chuck was preaching Linda and I were listening while stuck in traffic on I 20 west of Little Rock. Chuck did a great job preaching and leading while we were gone. But the whole time I was listening I was longing to be there and the one preaching. There is very little I love more than presenting the Word of God to you, so I understand the heart of Paul in this verse. He wanted to be with them again and teaching them. That is not a slam on Timothy or who ever was teaching. It was his desire to be there himself. I get that!

1 Thessalonians 3:11–13 (ESV)

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you,

12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,

13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

These verses form another paragraph, but it was so short I decided to add it to the previous paragraph because Paul continues the thought from the previous paragraph into this one.

Paul longed to be with the Thessalonians and was praying that God would so direct that they could be with them again. Paul's desire was clear and not self-serving at all. He wanted to be with the church in Thessalonica so that he could continue to teach

them and they would continue to develop in their relationship with God.

The reality is, no matter how good the teaching is, there is still more to learn, and you must continue to learn and grow. The life of a follower of Jesus can never be stagnant; it must keep growing. A few years ago when most you read through the Bible for the first time you did not know everything in the bible. Same is true for the second time, the third time, and I suspect the 100th or 1000th time. There will always be the thing to learn and ways to grow into what you have learned. Paul wanted to be the catalyst for that continued growth.

What is the result of that continuing study and growth? That our hearts are established blameless in holiness before God. The more we study and grow in our relationship with God the more established our hearts are in following God.

Now, let me be perfectly clear here. Paul is not talking about salvation here. That is already cared for and we stand before God blameless because of fo the filter of the blood of Christ. Paul is talking about the purity of our relationship with Him after our conversion. He is talking about our maturity level as a follower of Jesus.

Notice how he ends the paragraph here. “That our hearts may be established blameless in holiness before God at the coming of the Lord.” We have to think about this in the grammatical context it is offered in. Paul wants to continue teaching them so

that they continue to mature so that when further struggle and persecution comes, they remain blameless. Notice he did not say sinless, he said blameless. That tells me that the person is mature enough to recognize their sins and confess them to God and remain in a proper relationship with God. In other words that they continue to grow and respond to the struggles they face with proper grace, and when they do sin, they recognize it immediately confess it and repent. That is the character of a true follower of Jesus.

Conclusion

So what does all this mean for us in South West Florida 2000 years after it was written? I think it means that the reality is pain and suffering is a normal part of the life of a follower of Jesus. It also means that God uses the pain and suffering to shape us and mold us as we continue to grow in our relationship with Him.

Paul demonstrated his love for the Thessalonians by being concerned for their faith, their understanding of God's Word and wanting to make sure they were growing in their understanding of God's Word. It also seems that Paul was more concerned with their character and spiritual condition than he was in their physical condition. We need to follow that example. We are quick to pray for physical needs, and that is ok but we must not do it to the exclusion of their spiritual needs. In fact, as Paul demonstrated praying for spiritual needs is more important than physical needs.

Paul also reminds us that our character and our love for others demonstrates our relationship with God Himself. Those who are more concerned about their own needs and wants do not have a good relationship with God. The true follower of Jesus is more concerned for the other person, sometimes to their own detriment and hazard.

We need to keep these truths in mind this week as we go through our daily life. We need to be focused on God's Word and how to live it out honoring God. That means reaching out to those who do not know Him. Caring for those around us, even if it is inconvenient to us or dangerous to us. We need to be continuously growing in our knowledge and application of God's Word, especially the going and making disciples. We need to praise God for what He has done in us and through us but we cannot must not rest on what has been done. There is still a great deal to do, more people to reach and more of God's Word to learn and live.

God has tested us lately and I believe we have passed the test. But if we are in exactly the same place in the next test, and there will be more tests, then we will not be found blameless in holiness before God. So let's continue moving forward in our quest to follow Jesus.

Let's Pray!