

THE SANCTIFIED CHURCH

TEXT: I THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

1. The emphasis in chapter 1 was on salvation (cf. 1:5, 9, 10).
2. The emphasis in chapter 2 was on service (cf. 2:9).
3. The emphasis here in chap. 3 is on sanctification, i.e., holiness (cf. 3:13).

I. THEY REMAINED STEADFAST (3:1-8, esp. vs. 8).

1. "Wherefore" (3:1) – i.e., because of Paul's affection for them and because of his great disappointment in not being able to return to them (cf. 2:18).
2. Because Paul "could no longer forbear" (3:1), he sent Timothy to them, in order to comfort them (3:2).
3. Acts 17:14 and 15 tells us that the brethren in Berea sent Paul away by sea, but Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. Paul arrived in Athens and requested that Silas and Timothy should join him as soon as possible.
4. First Thessalonians 3:2 seems to say that Timothy arrived in Athens and then was sent by Paul to Thessalonica. This detail is not recorded in the book of Acts.
5. Paul wanted the believers in Thessalonica to know that they should not be "moved by these afflictions" (3:3), i.e., disturbed by these pressures or tensions.
6. Paul says, "for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (3:3). God allows these afflictions for a reason.
7. Our Lord said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33).
8. Paul said in II Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."
9. Illustration: A man was traveling through a logging area and was watching the lumberjacks at work. He was watching one lumberjack as he would occasionally jab his sharp hook into a log in order to separate it from the others as they floated down a mountain stream. When asked why he did this, the logger replied, "These logs may all look alike to you, but I can recognize that a few of them are quite different. The ones I let pass are from trees in a valley where they are always protected from the storms. Their

grain is rather coarse. The ones I have hooked and kept apart come from up high on the mountains. From the time they were small they were beaten by strong winds. This toughens the trees and gives them a fine grain. We save them for choice work. They are too good to be used for ordinary lumber.”

10. The application: Has the grain of your character been finely arranged by the toughening action of life’s trials and adversity?
11. Bristlecone pines are the world's oldest living trees. They 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.
12. We are told that their brutal environment is actually one of the reasons they've survived for thousands of years. Hardship has produced extraordinary strength and staying power.
13. F.B. Meyer said, "There are certain plants of the Christian life, such as meekness, gentleness, kindness, humility, which cannot come to perfection if the sun of prosperity always shines."
14. “For yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (3:3).
15. In I Thessalonians 3:4, Paul says, “we should suffer tribulation.” This refers to “afflictions” (3:3). And persecution.
16. This was part of Paul's message, as we see in Acts 14:22 -- “that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”
17. Satan the hinderer (I Thess. 2:18) is called “the tempter” in 3:5.
18. The devil stirs up persecution and he endeavours to tempt men to turn away from the truth, and to abandon their faith.
19. Albert Barnes said, "In persecution, men are tempted to apostatize from God, in order to avoid suffering. In afflictions of other kinds, Satan often tempts the sufferer to murmur and complain; to charge God with harshness, partiality, and severity."
20. Job's wife said to Job, "Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9).
21. The devil is not only the hinderer and the tempter, but he is also the deceiver. Revelation 12:9 says he "deceiveth the whole world."
22. God allows various trials and tribulations in order to test the genuineness of our profession. Trials often reveal genuine faith. In Matthew 13:21, our Lord refers to the professed believer who has no root in himself, but endures only for a while, and "when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." "Offended" means he stumbles and falls.

23. Paul was unable to go to Thessalonica, so he sent Timothy (3:5, 6), who brought back a good report.
24. Paul himself was going through a difficult time (“our affliction and distress” – 3:7), but Timothy’s report from the church at Thessalonica brought comfort to him. Their steadfastness was a great source of comfort to Paul in his trials.
25. “For now we live...” (3:8), in other words, “now we are really living; we are enjoying life.” Worldly people think that to “live it up” you have to turn your back on God, and run after worldly pleasures, but they are badly mistaken.

II. THEY WERE PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER (3:9-12).

1. Paul gave thanks to God for their salvation, spiritual growth, and fellowship (3:9-12).
2. “Joy” (3:9) comes from a heart full of thankfulness towards God.
3. “Night and day praying exceedingly” (3:10-12; cf. 1:2, 3; 5:17) comes from a heart full of love for them and for God.
4. If we have love “toward all men” (3:12), we should give generously to missions, and we should be zealous soulwinners.

III. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THE LORD TO RETURN (3:13).

1. Paul prayed that they would increase and abound in love, to the end that the Lord would establish their hearts "unblameable in holiness before God" at the second coming of Christ (3:12, 13).
2. In I & II Thessalonians, every chapter has some reference to the second coming of Christ (I Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:2; II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 3:5).
3. The second coming of Christ is a purifying hope (3:13; cf. I John 3:1-3).
4. Albert Barnes said, "When we come to appear amidst that vast assemblage of holy beings, the honours of the world will appear to be small things; the wealth of the earth will appear worthless, and all the pleasures of this life beneath our notice. Happy will they be who are prepared for the solemnities of that day, and who shall have led such a life of holy love -- of pure devotion to the Redeemer -- of deadness to the world--and of zeal in the cause of pure religion--of universal justice, fidelity, honesty, and truth, as to be without reproach, and to meet with the approbation of their Lord."

5. "Unblameable" (3:13) means "blameless," not sinless. It means "deserving no censure." Luke 1:6 says Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth (parents of John the Baptist) "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."
6. Philippians 2:14 and 15 says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."
7. Likewise, "perfect" (3:10) does not refer to sinless perfection. The day is coming when we Christians shall be perfect, and absolutely unblameable, not only in our position before God but in our spiritual state.
8. That will be the day when we will stand before Christ at His coming. "This is the great expectation behind Paul's prayer that these Thessalonians may grow in grace and attain the ultimate goal of being unblameable in holiness before Christ at His coming" (John Walvoord, *The Thessalonian Epistles*).

CONCLUSION:

"Ministers who are really sent of God greatly rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of their people. If they see God's Word prosper, they prosper. If the church of God is blessed, they are blessed. Their life is wrapped up in the spiritual life of their people. Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge. On the other hand, if God does not bless the word of His servants, it is like death to them!

"To be preaching and to have no blessing makes them heavy of heart—the chariot wheels are taken off and they drag heavily along—they seem to have no power nor liberty. They get depressed and they go back to their Master with this complaint, 'Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" -- CH Spurgeon