

Staying the Course

Call to Worship: Psalm 75:1

Hymn #727- *When the Roll is Called Up Yonder*

1st Scripture: 1 Peter 5:1-11

Hymn Insert- *In Christ Alone*

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Hymn #725- *His Eye is on the Sparrow*

Introduction

Having dealt with the main purpose of his letter, which was to address the dangerous teaching that was infiltrating the Thessalonian church (concerning the return of Christ), we saw last time that Paul now makes his way into the conclusion of his letter, where he will address a key practical matter that sprouts out of the false teaching that he has already addressed. Again, what you believe always affects how you live. And so, having addressed what some were beginning to believe, he also moves on to address the ungodly living that was further being exhibited among those who believed the lie.

In moving on then from the theological concern to the sinful actions that were springing out of that poisonous theology, Paul uses a small bridge to get there. And we saw last time, that this bridge began with a plea for the Thessalonians to pray for Paul (and his companions) that the word of God would run swiftly and be glorified, even as it had with the Thessalonians, and that they would be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.

This morning, we continue along this same bridge, which next time, Lord willing, will lead us into Paul's main practical concern, dealing with the ungodly living of some.

I. The Lord is Faithful!

"*But* the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one" (vs. 3). Here, we find Paul using the connective word, "but," implying that he will bring about some contrast to what he has just said. And he does this, in such a way, that he will now bring their attention away from his personal prayer request (which he has interjected for a moment), and back to the need of the Thessalonians themselves. And in this way, he will effectively bridge into the next and closing matter that he wishes to address.

And so, preceding the word "but," Paul had just requested that the Thessalonians pray for him (and his companions) that they would be delivered from "unreasonable and wicked men." And as I said last week, the Thessalonians could identify with this prayer request, because they had been facing ongoing persecution from such men themselves, for as long as they had been established as a church. Recognizing this then, Paul turns their attention away from his own trials in this regard, and back to them. And so, it were as if he were saying, "Please pray for us, that the ministry of the word would be blessed and glorified quickly, and that God would deliver us from unreasonable and wicked men (for not all have faith), but know for sure, that in your own experience with such opposition, God will establish and protect you...etc."

Having the understanding of this connection in mind then, let us look again more specifically at the actual wording of verse 3, and let us make a few relevant observations. "*But* the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one" (vs. 3).

Consider then, a few observations implied by this statement, brethren:

1) Paul affirms something critical about the character of God here, in the face of the painful and harsh persecutions which they were suffering. "The Lord is faithful!" And brethren, isn't that the critical foundation, which is always attacked when we go through times of trial and suffering...especially prolonged suffering? "Will God be faithful?" "Is God truly faithful?" "How much longer, Lord, will this continue?" "Why are you allowing this, Lord?" "Where are you, O God?" "Am I truly even Your child?"

The Thessalonians were enduring continual, ongoing, suffering with no end in view, at the hands of unreasonable and wicked men, who were persecuting them. They have lost beloved brethren in the course of this suffering. You can bet that, although they were persevering, they faced inward and outward challenges, which questioned the faithfulness of God in all of this. "If God is sovereign, and if He is faithful, when will He step in and bring relief to His suffering people?" And so, Paul avows here that the Lord is indeed faithful! And the implications of this reality are that all of these things were happening right according to plan and for very important reasons, including their sanctification and the setting forth of the Thessalonian's patience and perseverance, as a glorious example to all of the other churches. Their perseverance was a glorious confirmation of the reality and power of the gospel in saving and transforming formerly

lost and dead sinners! Their faith through it all, was more precious than silver and gold which perish, and would soon bring forth its eternal reward in glory! Indeed, the Lord is faithful and they were not forgotten.

2) The Lord's faithfulness would be further confirmed as He would establish (strengthen and settle) them (vs. 3b). Here, we find that Psalm 23 idea, namely, that the Lord would prepare a table before them in the presence of their enemies. They may have enemies, but God would supply their needs and give them peace, such peace, that they could comfortably dine in the presence of their enemies, as it were. They could realize that their sovereign God would protect them and shield them (as we will see in a moment), knowing full well that every one of their enemies was on a leash, as it were, restricted by the sovereign power and hand of God, limited to do only what He Himself has already ordained! God would settle them, and give them all of the strength and guidance they needed to endure.

3) The Lord is faithful, who will "guard you from the evil one." Again, here we find what we considered last week, namely, that the ultimate enemy behind all physical enemies (behind all "unreasonable and wicked men") is Satan himself, and his wicked minions. But, even they are no match for God. They remain on a leash, doing nothing more than what God ordains, though their own personal motives be evil. The Lord guards His people from the evil one. Though they don't always feel it, He is right there, completely surrounding them at all times. And nothing penetrates His protection, beyond what He allows for their own sanctifying good and His glory! And so, Paul mentions the "evil one," here, so as to encourage the Thessalonians to consider that God not only guards them from what they can see and hear and feel, but furthermore, in a far greater sense, the Lord guards them from the much greater powers of the unseen realm, who are the driving forces behind all physical evil. When the Lord has your back in this way, you have every reason to be comforted, and then some!

And so, these are some of the implications of Paul's encouraging statement given here in verse 3. The Lord is faithful! He is trustworthy and will never let His people down! What He says He will do, He is doing, and will do!

II. Staying the Course

Having expressed his confidence that the Lord would shield and protect the Thessalonians, he moves on in verse 4 to express his confidence in the Lord that the Thessalonians would obey the commands that Paul gives them. And in saying this, he is not only addressing what he has already said in this letter, but he is further preparing them for the commands that he is about to give them in verses 6 and 12.

And so, he states, "And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things that we command you" (vs. 4).

And so, what is Paul (and his co-laborers) confident about. That the Thessalonians would do all that he has commanded in this letter, and that, they will continue in this obedience going forward, evidencing that their obedience is from the heart, and not merely from the intellect. This obedience will have longevity. It will not start out well and then dwindle down. The Thessalonians had already proven their desire to obey the commands of the Lord, they would continue to do so now, and they will stay the course on the journey ahead. Paul was confident in this.

But notice, as well, that Paul's confidence was not fixed on the natural ability and strength of the Thessalonians. No, his confidence was in the strength and power of the Lord, the same Lord, who had already marvelously worked among the Thessalonians from the moment they were first saved and had forsaken their idols and determined to follow Christ. Hear again, "And we have confidence *in the Lord* concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you." Paul knew that, He who began the good work in the Thessalonians would complete it, unto the Day of Christ Jesus. God would keep them on the course of persistent and consistent obedience!

This reality leads Paul into another short Benedictory appeal, to the Lord, on behalf of the Thessalonians. "Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ." Here, Paul appeals to God to direct the hearts of the Thessalonians into the place where they would find, both the motive and the power, to obey God in these matters (and in all matters for that matter). "Now may the Lord direct your hearts..." Which Person of the Godhead directs the hearts? The Holy Spirit. And so, we might reckon this, "May the Holy

Spirit, who resides in you, direct your hearts..." The necessity of the Spirit's work in this regard is evident. Our hearts are naturally deceitful and wicked, leading us in all manner of ungodly directions. We cannot trust our own hearts, which is why God has given us His Word, and not our emotions, to direct our paths, as we seek to serve Him. And the Spirit, illuminates that Word to us, and opens our hearts to It. And so, Paul appeals to God to direct their hearts in a particular direction, which would inevitably drive them to continue to obey from the heart.

And what direction is that? First, into the love of God. That is, into a proper, continual understanding of the very real love of God toward them, in Christ. God's love has been expressed toward His people in His electing them before time to adopt them by grace. It has been expressed toward His people in the sending of His own beloved Son (in time) to secure that adoption and their redemption and complete salvation by His obedient life and shed blood. His love has been expressed in regenerating them and bringing them into that adoption, by a God-given faith, and a blessed union with Christ. And it is further expressed by the continual fellowship that God maintains with His incomplete people, and in the process of their sanctification, whereby He lovingly forms more of His Son in them. And finally, it will be further expressed in all of the blessed and eternal treasures that will accompany eternal life in glory! And even this, though not yet fully realized, God gives His people a taste of it, through His Word and by the blessed down payment of the Holy Spirit, who compels us to cry out, "Abba, Father!" Paul appeals to God, to direct their hearts into this very real love, which will drive them unto sincere obedience. [Ephesians 3:14-21]

And finally, he also appeals to God to direct their hearts into the patience of Christ. It is the reality of Christ's patience, summed up in His incarnation, His life, and especially His suffering and death, which drives the people of God to exhibit a *like* patience in their own sufferings and trials. In this sense, though certainly not in an identical sense, they can identify with their Lord and Savior, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the Power on High! Christ's suffering and patience drives us to endure the same, remembering the purpose and the ultimate outcome of it all, and that nothing is wasted by God. Every iota of suffering at the cross was used by God unto the purpose of procuring salvation for a multitude without number. And every iota of suffering

and bearing a cross, which is endured by His people, is used by God unto their sanctification, so that, they might be conformed into the image of His Beloved Son! None is wasted. And so, Paul wishes God to direct their hearts into both the love of God (as a motive for joyfully pressing on) and the patience of Christ (as an example to carry with us in our sufferings).

Such an appeal was fit for the Thessalonians, whose ongoing trials and sufferings would naturally drive them to some path of disobedience and quick fix comfort, rather than persevere in the gospel. This then brings us over the bridge, from Paul's expressed theological concern, into the practical disobedience that would naturally flow out of it. And hopefully, by the grace of God, Paul has prepared them to obey, by appealing to God on their behalf, that He would direct their minds and hearts into these faith and obedience empowering places, as he prepares to now give them very specific commands, which Lord willing, we will consider next time.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having finished looking at our main text then, brethren, let us now conclude our time by considering a few, relevant closing thoughts and applications.

1) Brethren, consider those two critical weapons for the warfare, which will enable us to maintain a pattern of persistent obedience and perseverance, namely, the love of God and the patience of Christ.

Are you struggling with obedience to the commands of God? Do you find yourself slipping more freely into sin, or into sins which you once overcame? How often do you spend time pondering the sincere love of God for you, as revealed in His Word? Do you see here, again, that critical connection of meditating upon the Word of God daily, and your obedience to God? We need continual, daily reminders of God's love for us, if we are to withstand the temptations of the evil one, who puts lustful delicacies before our eyes, with the hope that in the neglect of God's Word, we might once again find our joy, fulfillment and relief in such things. But, if we are stewards of God's Word, and if we daily seek to pursue God's love for us, in Christ, as it is revealed to us in His Word, we will find ourselves advancing in the battle!

When He is near, temptation loses its power. And He draws near to us through His Word, the very means, by which, the Holy Spirit bridges us into fresh reminders of the love of God for

us and for all of His people. Oh brethren, if we are too busy with Martha, scurrying and worrying about many things, then let us take our seat with Mary, at the feet of Christ, that we might relish in the love of God for us (in Christ), and thereby find strength and grace to continue in our obedient walk with Christ!

And as we struggle through the trials and sufferings of life, likewise, by the Word, let us ponder and lay hold of the patience of Christ. Let us see there, that we are not alone in our sufferings, and in fact, our sufferings presently resonate with our Mediator, Intercessor and High Priest! Our sufferings are found on a path that was already travelled by Christ Himself, and by all of the faithful, throughout all of the ages, who have since made it home to glory. If we see, in the Word, that we are not alone in our sufferings, and the glorious end for which Christ suffered, we will be further motivated and strengthened to endure the road that lies in front of us, whatever we may face along the way. Let us therefore pray, that God, by His Spirit, would lead us continually into His love and into the patience of Christ, as we daily dip our mouths into the fountain of His Word, which alone can take us there. In this way, we will find a road to faithful, consistent, ongoing obedience and perseverance.

2) Notice, brethren, that the love of God always drives us to obedience and to encourage obedience and never to find comfort in, accept or condone sin (of any kind). There is a terrible wrangling and distortion of the true meaning of "love" in our day, which sadly has infiltrated many churches. People presume that the "loving" thing to do is to accept and support people in their sin. How many so-called churches have gone down this fiery path by compromising in things such as welcoming and marrying homosexuals in the body? Matthew Vines, the alleged Christian author, in his abominable work, "Love wins," has helped add fuel to this already raging fire, such that, Christians, who love sinners, but yet call them to repentance (by that love) are labeled bigots and hateful, for being unwilling to distort the true love of God (who is love) by equating love with leaving people in their sin. That's hatred! Christians that refuse to condone such sins are labeled unaccepting, unloving, hateful...etc.

And so, here we see, brethren, that being led into the love of God is God's primary means of not leaving us in our sins, but rather, of turning us away from them. We must understand, brethren, that it is never, ever a loving thing to do, to leave people in their sin. Indeed, love hurts

and is willing to wound, if it can honor God and spare others a lot of grief later, for clinging to their sins. This goes for any area of obedience, brought forth in God's Word.

3) The Gospel.

Amen

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21