

Context: Paul sends Timothy to minister to the Thessalonians during their time of suffering from persecution and difficulty

His Deep Concern for How the Thessalonians Responded to Their Suffering – v.1

- Paul had been in Athens after leaving Thessalonica; he was there with his companions, still concerned about them
- When “we” (v.1) “I” (v.5) could no longer endure it; what was the “it?”
- Illustration: muscle failure after holding up great weight
- The question about the continuance of their faith in the face of their affliction
- He came up with a plan in response; to send Timothy to check on them and to help them
- This meant that Paul was left alone there; don’t underestimate the sacrifice on Paul’s part; consider his relationship with - Timothy in ministry – 1Cor4:17; Phil2:19-20; 1 & 2 Tim1:2
- He considered it “good” to send him; he weighed out the benefit to them (and long term to himself), and was willing himself to sacrifice and suffer the loss of his closest companion and most trustworthy son in the faith

His Reminder that Suffering is Universally Experienced and Appointed for a Purpose – v.3-4

- “these afflictions” – the Greek word covers more than affliction through persecution, but troubles, distresses, hard circumstances
- You yourselves know this/we told you “before”- it was not a surprise, it was a part of the fundamental teaching of the Gospel laid out in the early stages of their becoming Christians; this had been confirmed by their actual experience
- This was a part of their suffering in common with humanity as a result of the fall; there is only one time that these things will be wiped away
- But even beyond this, they were told that they were “appointed” to this; the word means to be set in place, to be situated into (by the direction of another) to be destined into
- This indicates purpose, more than chance happening; there was someone external to themselves who was orchestrating these things for a specific purpose

His Concern for What Was at Stake in Their Suffering – v.5

- He sent to know their faith; he knew if their faith was in good shape, that they would endure and cling to God
- What could undermine this was the active work of the “tempter”, the Devil
- His concern was for the possibility of being “shaken” by these afflictions (v.3)
- The temptation in the midst of the suffering could be: God doesn’t care; God isn’t in control; serving God does bring any benefit
- The outcome of this in relation to Paul’s ministry among them was the possibility was that their labor was “in vain”
- This word means to be empty handed, to no purpose, without result
- Paul is not concerned that some of them (from God’s perspective) who are truly saved will lose that salvation, but rather (from our perspective) that the word that has been sown will in the end be seen to have been labor without fruit (Lk8:13 (temptation) Mt13:21 (difficulty/persecution), thus in vain
- He doesn’t want to labor in vain, like a workman in a field who doesn’t care; and he is taking every human effort to cultivate that seed and that ground (not just “leave it to God”)

How He Responded to This Crisis to Help Them – v.2

- Brother; minister of God; fellow laborer in the Gospel of Christ
- What could he do? Stop the suffering and difficulty? Convince their family, former friends, the government to back off and be kind?
- It was to help them in regards to their faith; specifically, to establish them in it and encourage them in it
- It was this that could help keep them from being “shaken by these afflictions” (v.3)
- What did they need to help their faith? It is seen in the phrase “the Gospel of Christ”
- It was the Gospel which they not only believed in the beginning for salvation, but what would continue to uphold them and help them through the trials
- He was sent because it was the application of the Gospel of Christ that would help them

APPLICATION

- As believers, we need the Gospel: it relates to *everything* that we may suffer; all are a kind of trial
- *Some ways how the Gospel strengthens in such times* : like Christ, our sufferings have a purpose (Heb5:8), compares what we suffer compared to what we deserve (Heb13:5-6 Rom8:30...what can man, or the devil, or cancer, or _____ do to us), helps us to identify and know Jesus more deeply (Phil3:10), causes us to be discontent for the world and longing for Christ’s return – following Christ is itself a call to die daily (Lk9:23)
- How are we helping one another through difficulties? It will be through the Gospel; mere sympathy is not enough, but speaking the Word to one another
- Our greatest concern (in ourselves) isn’t the suffering itself, but rather the upholding of faith in the midst of it
- The loss of clinging onto God in such difficulties has more serious consequences than temporary suffering (as painful as it is)
- Our Gospel-oriented response to difficulty is important to demonstrate that the Gospel has not been received in vain