

For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. (1 Thess. 3:8)

I. Cost of Discipleship (vv. 1-5)

- a. While at Athens, Paul was unable to return to the Thessalonians, he sent Timothy to find out if they were standing firm in the faith.
- b. The phrase *when we could bear it no longer*, underscores Paul's feelings for the Thessalonians. (v.1)
- c. Paul set an example for ministers and Christians, that we should be more concerned with the spiritual health of others than with our own comforts and desires. (Phil 2:4)
- d. How far will you go to disciple someone?
- e. Paul's purpose of sending Timothy was not simply to learn about the church's progress in difficult times, but to urge them to remain steadfast in their *obedience* to Christ.
- f. New Christians need to be nurtured and continually encouraged. They are like tender plants that can be easily crushed by life's difficulties.
 1. They need the advice and support of mature Christians, especially if their faith is being tested.
- g. The enemies of Christ are always quick to sow seeds of doubt about the truth of the Gospel.
- h. When you disciple someone you do not want them to *waver or be shaken* by difficulties they will encounter. You do not want them to *fall back*, because of your investment in them.
- i. Timothy would minister among them and would be like a wall of protection against the fiery darts of the evil one.
- j. Our enemy has many disguises and pretends to be working for our good. He comes to us masquerading as an angel of light to draw us back into darkness.
- k. We must stand firm, clothed in the full armor of God, crying out to our Savior for the strength to resist his subtle attacks.

II. Destined for Trials (vv.6-13)

- a. The Thessalonians' persecution problems were not accidental, for God determined them. They were not all caused by the wrath of their enemies, but by God's appointment.
- b. *Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* (2 Tim 3:12) (Acts 14:22)
- c. Think about *what* is working against the new Christian: the old life (thinking, attitude, outlook); the flesh (personal desires that lead to sin); and the environment (the world challenges your faith).
 1. Friends and family will question your devotion, discipline and destiny.
- d. Think about *who* is working for the new Christian: **God**, who is greater; **Jesus Christ**, He is your shield and buckler (Psalm 91:4); **the Holy Spirit**; He leads us into righteousness;
 1. **The Church**; which serves as the visible, yet spiritual, protective presence of God. (v.12)
 2. *What, then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31)
- e. Trouble is a consequence of our faith.

III. Practical Lessons

- a. Lesson #1 – True discipleship requires sacrificial follow up. This work is never easy!
- b. Lesson #2 – Our Kingdom birth and life are not to be experienced alone.
- c. Lesson #3 – The fire of affliction draws songs of praise. Do not be afraid to be tried by fire.