

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Evidences of Faith: Temptation"

1 Thessalonians 3:5

Introduction

1. One of the most amazing missionary/pastors of all time is the apostle Paul. His energy carried him beyond normal limits (Rom. 15:20, 21). Furthermore, he had such a warm and concerned heart for his converts (1 Thess. 2:1-20). He was in the work totally!

2. Paul's burden for the Thessalonians forced him to send Timothy to find out how they were making out (v. 2). They were under the gun of terrible trial and Paul was deeply concerned for them. To this end, he endeavored the more to support them and provide explanations of their difficulty (vv. 2-4). One thing is certain: Paul wanted the believers to understand that their personal faith in Christ included afflictions (Phil. 1:29).

3. Additionally, true personal faith in Christ includes temptation. Salvation does not immunize a believer from the attacks of the Evil One. Apparently, however, this was so intense at Thessalonica that Paul wondered about the outcome of the matter. It is this deep burden which comes across in the text. Consider then these aspects of temptation:

1. ITS DEFINITION

The problem of temptation concerns the endeavor of Satan to persuade or to entice the believer to do something which is wrong by promise of pleasure or gain. That Satan is active in this process is clear (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul admonishes to be alert to his strategies (Eph. 6:11). Admittedly, the sin nature is also involved in temptation (James 1:13, 14). God is never to be accused of the source of temptation (notwithstanding Hebrews 11:17 and John 6:6).

2. ITS DESCRIPTION

a. As a concern

The verb "forbear" is the same as used earlier (v. 1). Paul could not conceal his feelings of love for the Thessalonians. He had to express his deep concern. This was related to his passion to keep abreast of what was

going on at Thessalonica. He sent Timothy so that he might "know." This infinitival verb expresses purpose. The particular Greek verb employed marks progress in knowing. He just had to find out about their personal faith in the face of temptation. This is godly anxiety for others.

b. As a crisis

Satan is here called the "tempter." The root word is used twice in this one verse. Satan had already hindered the missionaries from getting to the city (2:18). Now Paul is sensing a real crisis: has Satan succeeded in overthrowing what they had done among them? The verb used here normally means to "make a trial of something." It is used of the trial of Christ's integrity (Matt. 19:3; 22:18), of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:9), and of God's grace (Acts 15:10). As far as Paul is concerned, failure lurked at the door of these believers. He actually entertained the thought that his entire effort at Thessalonica might turn out "in vain." The verb "be" is better rendered "become." For Paul, his whole labor at the city might yet turn out to be fruitless (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58 where this word "vain" is used). It must be remembered that God overrules such "temptation" (1 Cor. 10:13). While God permits it to come, it is with a purpose (James 1:3, 4; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7).

3. ITS COUNTERACTION

Believers must handle temptation. Some, however, treat it lightly. They feel they are free under grace to do anything! Others deny moral standards in the Word and speak like apostates. Some seek to give a spiritual guise to unscriptural actions. Many refuse to submit to the Lord and His Word. Our Lord has given us the secret on how to deal with temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). While all "how to" programs have their problems, this one is a sure winner. Why? Because it is right in the Word. Our Lord resisted temptation in these three ways:

a. By believing the Word

It is clear that when Satan tempted our Lord (v. 1) that the basic response was "it is written" (vv. 4, 7, 10). This is the perfect form of the verb. It could be translated "it stands written." Christ believed what was in the Bible and that settled it. He did not appeal to some psychological principle, but to the Word. He believed the

Word. Hallelujah. Do you believe it that way?

b. By knowing the Word

In each of the quotations our Lord gave, He knew their import. He was not just quoting Scripture, but putting them where they belonged! Even when Satan quoted Scripture, Christ corrected him in its use. One wonders if believers know the Word as well as Satan does! Oh, to dig deep into the Word and be fortified with its knowledge against the Evil One.

c. By obeying the Word

Apparently it is not enough to believe and know the Word. One must also obey it. Had Christ not demonstrated His belief in the Word, He would not have obeyed it. His response was right, hence we know he obeyed it implicitly. The Word has power (Heb. 4:12). Obedience is a vital key to the defeat of Satan in temptation (Psa. 119:9, 11).

Conclusion Temptation is real in the life of a child of God (Heb. 4:15). It is not wrong to be tempted, but it is wrong to yield to it. Satan and the old sin nature cooperate to bring about moral, ethical, and spiritual defeat in the life of a believer. The key to triumph is the Word of God. Christ showed this to be true. It is our privilege to accept His example and enjoy the fruit of victory (1 Pet. 2:21).