

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Evidences of Faith: Fellowship"

1 Thessalonians 3:6

Introduction

1. Paul wrote this book to the Thessalonians because of his fathomless concern for them. He was a man of God with a heart for the flock at Thessalonica which God had commenced through him. He was a true missionary/pastor (1 Thess. 2).
2. It was because of Paul's deep sincerity for the Thessalonians that he wrote this chapter (see "wherefore" in v. 1). The key word for the chapter is "faith." Not a body of faith, but personal faith.
3. Paul had already sent Timothy to learn about their faith (v. 2). He was concerned about their suffering (vv. 1-4) and their temptation (v. 5). The present text concerns Paul's interest in learning how the missionary converts felt about himself (v. 6). The reply was a great cheer to his heart. Note the items about their fellowship and faith:

1. IT WAS REPORTED

The particle "now" indicates that Timothy had just then come back from Thessalonica and reported to Paul. Timothy had come back and could say that his mission was accomplished. Faithful Timothy--how such men of God are needed in these days (Phil. 2:19-23).

2. IT WAS EXPRESSED

The verb for "brought good tidings" is the common one used in the New Testament for preaching the Gospel. It was as if Timothy evangelized Paul with the tidings he brought from Thessalonica. The verb is used in other ways but is limited to a few places like here and Luke 1:19. In the LXX it was used of any message which was calculated to bring a cheering effect upon those who received it (e.g. 1 Sam. 31:9; 2 Sam. 1:10). It is obviously so used here. The message Timothy brought concerned their "faith and love." The usual trilogy which included "hope" is not found here (cf. Col. 1:4, 5). The order is important. Faith precedes love. In these days of mixed up doctrine, it certainly puts the onus on those who emphasize love at the expense of faith, whether personal or corporate. This is not to minimize the fact

that true personal faith will issue in true Spirit-wrought love (cf. Rom. 5:1, 5). True faith will know the meaning of true love.

3. IT WAS RELATED

Timothy reported that the faith and love of the believers was manifested in two ways:

a. In prayer

This is the obvious meaning of the words "ye have good remembrance of us always...." The word for "good" means good in a beneficial or effective sense, as opposed to that which is intrinsic. But the key is the word "remembrance." It is pointing to prayer (Phil. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; Philemon 4). The adverb "always" indicates that their concerns in prayer for Paul were on all occasions when he prayed. They were constantly thinking of him.

b. In fellowship

This is the significance of the phrase "greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you." It is as if Paul could not withhold himself. When he learned they wanted to see him, he added his concern for them also. The verb used here is found elsewhere in the same way (cf. 2 Cor. 7:7 of Titus; Phil. 1:8 of Paul; and 2:26 of Epaphroditus; and again of Paul of those whom he had not seen in Rom. 1:11; 15:23). It is only used in one other connection by Paul--of the interim body (2 Cor. 5:2). To Paul, fellowship with the believers was an absolute priority. That's the way it should be!

Conclusion In these days of rush and movement, it is well to be reminded that a priority of true living personal faith is really the word "others." Fellowship is vital for us all. God help us to appreciate it, enjoy it, and provide it. Beyond the socio-fellowship arena are these: theological (1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 2:1; 1 John 1:3), evangelistic (Phil. 1:5; Gal. 2:9), ecclesiastical (Acts 2:42), and experiential which includes suffering (Phil. 3:10) and separation (1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:11). Note: the word "fellowship" in Ephesians 3:9 is better rendered "dispensation."