

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Evidences of Faith: Conviction"

1 Thessalonians 3:8

Introduction

1. While there are many facets to our relationship to the Lord, none is more important than personal faith. It is personal faith which is studied in this chapter (vv. 2, 5, 6, 8, 10).
2. Personal faith has already been linked with suffering (vv. 1-4), temptation (v. 5), and fellowship (vv. 6, 7). Now the issue is conviction.
3. Conviction is a strong persuasion or belief. This is very unpopular today. The modern world wants diversity of opinion as the norm. Precise and definitive beliefs are not considered erudite. Fortunately, the scholarship of the Bible is based upon revelation and not education, hence Paul knew with certainty (2 Tim. 1:12). The night is far spent. The need of the hour is for those who "know" and are willing to say so!

1. THE CASE STATED

It is clear that the first class conditional sentence is the key. It was assumed true that the Thessalonians did in fact continue (present tense) standing fast. There was a steadfastness "in the Lord" which could not be shaken (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2). They had come to the Lord and stood "in Him." He was all they had. They were anything but wobbly spiritually. There was a firmness about their position and relationship with the Lord.

2. THE PEACE NOTED

In view of the firm stand of the Thessalonians, Paul indicated that he "lived." His own peace of mind was dependent upon their steadfastness. Apprehension is gone and he enjoyed ease in mind because good news had come from Timothy concerning the Thessalonians.

This same word "stand fast" is used several times in the Word to demonstrate that this is the expected behavior of believers. In days of frightening instability, it is refreshing to turn again to the Word and see His expectations. Here are some:

- a. CONVICTION IN UNITY Phil. 1:27. There will always be differences of opinion among the saints. This is due to the old sin nature. But there is a divine unity gendered by the Holy Spirit which may be experienced. The "one spirit" here is the singleness of purpose of the believers (cf. 2 Cor. 12:18; Eph. 4:23; Rev. 19:10). This is enforced by the word

"one mind" (literally one soul), and "striving together" which is an athletic metaphor meaning to contend along with others for victory. In this verse, it concerns a unity in relationship to the faith of the Gospel, that is, its contents. That Paul argues against divisions is clear (1 Cor. 1). There is nothing so ruinous among true believers as schisms and fractures. God hates it (Prov. 6:19).

b. CONVICTION IN GRACE Gal. 5:1. The freedom with which Christ has made us free is salvation by grace through faith and apart from the law. Grace cannot be intermingled (Rom. 11:6). To mix law with grace is an impossible yoke. Neither can they work independently. The verb entangled is a strong term (cf. Mark 6:19; Luke 11:53). Those who confuse the issue of salvation on the ground of grace alone are not to be accepted. We must stand for salvation by grace alone (Gal. 1:6-10).

c. CONVICTION IN FELLOWSHIP Phil. 4:1. While there may have been some thought of defection from the Lord, Paul appeals against it. In the light of the enemies of the cross and the coming of Christ to glorify the body, he appeals to the saints to stand fast. That is the reason for the "wherefore" (cf. 3:18-21). They must never lose their attachment to Him and His cause. This is a strong bid for fellowship with Him at all costs.

d. CONVICTION IN DOCTRINE 2 Thess. 2:15. While all the other areas of conviction lend themselves to doctrine, this is explicit. It relates to apostolic teaching and is supported by the strong verb rendered "hold." It means to keep carefully and faithfully. There is little doubt that the "traditions" are not what is categorized as such today. They relate to apostolic ministry which was passed down from one to another. There was to be no deviation from this truth. Paul is urgent in this matter elsewhere (1 Cor. 16:13). There he views the believer in a battle situation. He is to "watch" for the enemy because he employs all sorts of seductiveness. He is to stand fast and hold his ground against the enemy. He is to act like a man, have courage and practice the right kind of fighting (e.g. they apparently lacked this and went to idolatrous feasts). He is to be strong and demonstrate spiritual power (they apparently did not and allowed incest among them). Doctrine will determine behavior. Belief should order one's behavior, not belief altering doctrine. Convictions are not evil. Those who don't have them are opposed to the Word.

Conclusion Personal faith has some grit in it. It is not waving at everything that passes by. It is standing! God give us more who do this.