

# The Faith Files

## The Letters to the Thessalonians

September 29, 2001

### 1. 1 Thessalonians 1:3

We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by **faith**, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- What did Paul remember before the Father? Their work, labor, and endurance. “Work” pertains to acts of kindness but “labor” is an expression that denotes effort over a longer period of time. One is short-term and the other is long-term.
- The implication of “remembering” here is mentioning. Paul must have been re-telling the Thessalonian deeds to God the Father. Imagine someone chronicling your good deeds to God on your behalf. That means that your faith deeds would have to be known well enough for someone to do that. Are your faith deeds well known? Are there enough for others to tell God about them? Are you telling God about someone else’s?
- Once again we see faith and love connected in a context of hope.
- What were the Thessalonians enduring? Probably persecution, which is a recurring theme of this first letter.

### 2. 1 Thessalonians 1:8

The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your **faith** in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,

- Other churches were talking about the Thessalonian faith. Churches have a level of “faith fame.” I don’t think it was just their decision to trust the Lord for salvation that was famous; they were doing something with their faith.
- The Faith Files are full of exhortations to do something with your faith? It’s time for a checkup: What are you doing with your faith in a God that can raise the dead? I am trusting God for my business being productive and successful; for 10,000 names on The Monday Memo list by December 31; to be out of debt and own a home in Florida in four years.

- Many churches have small group ministry where church members meet for prayer, Bible study, and mutual support. If you are in such a group, what is the group doing to encourage faithful action?

### 3. 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your **faith**, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. (NIV)

- Persecution and trials have a way of unsettling our faith. We begin to ask: Have we missed the Lord in some way? Done something wrong? Is God angry?
- Be encouraged! Your trials aren't because you've done something wrong, but something right. You are doing something with your faith and that has produced pressure.
- People who don't have faith are intimidated by those who do, and the former criticize or put obstacles in the path of those who have faith.
- Very often unbelieving family members are the ones who make it difficult for believers. Does your family have the power to intimidate your faith actions? Does God want you to give something away, but you're afraid of what your family might think? Isn't it time you grew up in the faith and stopped allowing family or other people to hinder your faith actions. Do what God wants you to do.
- Are you supportive of your other family members who have faith? Our 23-year-old son came to us several months ago and said the Lord spoke to him to move to Hawaii. My wife and I had concerns, but our son had faith and we wanted to encourage that above all else. He went, has had some struggles, but is growing in his faith. That is more important than anything else.

### 4. 1 Thessalonians 3:5-7

For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your **faith**. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your **faith** and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your **faith**. (NIV)

- Hard times come to everyone. Are you in hard times? Have you cut back on your giving because finances are scarce? I can remember as a pastor doing that in both the

church and my personal finances. It wasn't until I caught up on all my commitments that we saw financial breakthroughs

- What is your giving level? Is it all that it can be? That you want it to be? Are you current on all faith pledges you have made to missionaries, church, or other causes? Giving is one practical indicator of your faith level. Furthermore, it is something you can **do** with your faith.
- How about your stuff? Do you have too much stuff? Is it time to give some away? If you haven't used or worn it in a year, it's probably time to give it away!
- Paul understood as an apostle that he had to work to keep their faith level high. He sent Timothy to make sure that was happening. Paul did not expect the Thessalonians to minister to him; he sought to minister to them. He wasn't building a network of churches for his own fame, but building one that was famous for their faith.
- Too many apostles today are interested in money, title, position but not service. Paul did not just show up (or his representatives for that matter) to teach and collect an offering. There was obviously a strong relationship between Paul and this church, for they longed to see one another. Paul was eager to strengthen their faith, not make a deduction from their bank accounts.

### **5. 1 Thessalonians 3:10**

Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your **faith**. (NIV)

- Paul had a vibrant prayer life. We haven't talked a lot about faith and prayer, but we should. If you have faith in God and faith requires action, you can at least pray and ask God for what your faith focus is. And be bold in prayer. Don't apologize to God for what you're asking. Ask boldly; ask in faith.
- Paul was asking for another visit to the Thessalonians. His first visit was cut short by persecution. That is an unselfish prayer.
- Paul's objective was to bring something **to** the Thessalonians, not to take something **from** them. Faith looks to give, not receive.
- Are you believing the Lord for any missions activity? Where would you like to go? Whose faith needs what only you can supply, and a visit requires you to supply it? It doesn't matter if there are terrorists out there; there always have been. The world has always been a dangerous place. That is why you can overcome the world by faith. (Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 and see what Paul went through to visit the churches.)
- Where in the world do you want to go for God? Find it on the map. Lay hands on it. Set a date to go. Go.

## 6. 1 Thessalonians 5:8

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on **faith** and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (NIV)

- Both faith and love will protect our heart, since they make up our breastplate. What can they protect us from? Disappointment (those who trust in the Lord will never be disappointed), hurt feelings (love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things), and hardness of heart are a few that come to mind. Can you think of anything else from which love and faith can protect us from?
- A helmet and breastplate are armor that is used for war, whether offensive or defensive. Since we are looking forward to the day of the Lord, we are in a war with the unseen powers of the air. You cannot make sense of some things that you have gone or are going through apart from warfare.
- A helmet and breastplate are frontal armor. There is no protection for your back, for retreat, for shrinking back.

## 7. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your **faith** is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and **faith** in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. (NIV)

- Is your faith growing? Are you trusting God in more significant ways than you were a year ago? If not, what can you do about it?
- Paul preached about the Thessalonians in other churches and cities. I want others to talk about my faith exploits, even when I'm not around to hear them.
- But Paul boasted about their faith in trials. I want the testimony, but not the trials. Trials must be an important part of our development or else God wouldn't allow them to occur. That is why we are to rejoice in our trials (see James 1:3-5). Are you rejoicing in your trials?

## 8. 2 Thessalonians 1:11

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your **faith**. (NIV)

- My faith releases God to fulfill what it is I have faith for. My faith doesn't get the job done; God gets the job done. I am His faith partner.

- Many people say God “spoke to me” to do this or that. Can our faith prompt us to do something on our own? Is that possible? For instance, there is such a thing as a freewill offering. Can I decide to give something to God, an act prompted by faith, without God first prompting me to give it? Or is God the source of all good deeds, ideas, and acts of faith?
- Am I worthy of my calling? I think that is an unusual prayer for Paul to pray. If God makes me worthy, why would Paul feel the need to pray that God would count me worthy? I think it is because I have some discretion in how I carry out my calling to belong to God. Paul then prayed that the Lord would enable me to fulfill the things I decide to do in faith.

### 9. 2 Thessalonians 3:2

And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has **faith**.

- That is true: Not everyone has faith! Not even in the church!
- Notice Paul doesn't pray that we won't be **affected** by evil men, but that we will be **delivered**. That means that at times evil will surround us and we will have to be delivered from the danger not kept from exposure to the danger.
- Faith doesn't keep us from evil, but rather delivers us from the full effects of evil.

### 10. 1 Thessalonians 2:13

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who **believe**. (NIV)

- Here is an interesting relationship. When you accept the word of God, it works in you. The Greek word for “works” here is the word for energy. So the Word energizes you. You accept the Word, however, by faith, so the Word energizes you according to the faith you have. No faith, no energizing Word.
- If you are low on energy, are you low on faith? Does faith provide enthusiasm that gives you strength to do God's will and word?
- Your faith activates the Word, which produces the desired result in you. So have faith that God is working in you, whether you can see or feel it. In fact, consider where you were five years ago in your faith walk with God. Rejoice in your progress. Your faith is working!

### **11. 1 Thessalonians 4:14**

We **believe** that Jesus died and rose again and so we **believe** that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (NIV)

- There is logic to faith. Here Paul shows that if he believes that Jesus died and rose again, then it is logical that all can be raised from the dead. Remember that Abraham also used logic by thinking that even though his body was good as dead, God could still fulfill His promise to Abraham.
- The most important thing in logic is to start off at the correct premise to begin with. If God can raise the dead, then God can do anything. That is logical because we started with the correct premise.
- Use your logic to come to some faith conclusion based on the starting point that God is able to raise the dead. What can He do in your life based on that initial fact?

### **12. 2 Thessalonians 2:11**

For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will **believe** the lie.

- Faith is a way of life for everyone. You drive a car because you believe the other drivers will stay on their side of the road (in most countries!). You believe the can of beans you are opening is safe to eat, so you don't run tests on it to verify that fact. You believe (until recently) that the building you are in is safe and will not collapse. Everyone uses faith daily as a way to make it through life.
- If people choose not to believe in God, they will believe in something – superstition, false doctrines, humanism, or capitalism. If people work against God and His purposes, God will allow false influences to impact their faith due to their hardness of heart. Pharaoh continued to trust in a powerful delusion even though God made known His power through the plagues. Yet Pharaoh believed a delusion that his own magicians, his political duplicity and eventually the Egyptian army would save him. None of those did.
- God is merciful, but His mercy has an end at some point, especially for those who in pride resist God's ways. The only way to please God is by faith.