



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

## Encouraged about the Brethren

"Greater love," said Jesus, "has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Our Lord led the way on this, backing His words with the laying down of His life, His suffering a violent execution on the cross for the sins of mankind. This precept is then passed on to the true disciples of Christ, expressed in these terms by the apostle John: "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). As Jesus was wholly committed to reaching the lost and building His church, so also are those who lay down their lives for the brethren. This "cause", then, becomes the primary focus of their interests and conversation. Hence Paul, having suffered intensely in getting the gospel to Thessalonica,

was supremely interested in the spiritual safety and progress of those brethren.

▼ **Comforted** — Without the instantaneous means of modern communication, Paul is easily pictured as standing at some window well and looking into the distance toward Thessalonica, wondering if and how soon he will hear from Timothy. When Timothy finally arrived, bringing "good news," Paul's joy was manifest. "For this reason, brethren," is his comment concerning the great report, "in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:7). The encouraging and comforting news was that the faith of the brethren was great, and that they were able to look beyond their suffering, as Paul was his, to their own resurrection from the dead regardless of what earthly privations they might experience.

▼ **Living** — Paul had written to the brethren in Colossae, that Christ "is our life" (Colossians 3:4). In the proper perspective, Christ and those things intimately connected with Him are the only things that will last. Everything else will be destroyed by the moths or rust, or thieves will steal it, or it will burn in the last day. Thus, even as was noted in Old Testament writings, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls" (Proverbs 11:30). The apostle Paul, therefore, having dedicated his life to saving souls, particularly those of the Gentiles, was inextricably involved with the continued faithfulness of those brethren for whom and with whom he had labored. "We were comforted about you through your faith," he had stated as he heard the good news about their steadfastness through Timothy, "for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 3:8). To have suffered the total loss of the congregation in Thessalonica would have been, in one manner of speaking, a partial death for Paul. But with the good news, "we really live!" Of course, they must continue faithful until death for the effort to be secure.

▼ **With joy** — There is a certain satisfaction of a job well done, a positive type of pride in a major project successfully completed. By contrast, to see a job collapse or be trashed — such as bicycle tracks running through freshly finished concrete, and hardened beyond repair — or to experience a major project forced to incompleteness because of someone's stealing the money necessary for the final stages, would be a major blow. How much more, then, for the souls for whom someone like Paul labored and suffered in bringing them to Christ, only to see their faith collapse and for them to be sucked back into Satan's realm. "For what thanks can we render to God for you," exclaims the apostle, contemplating the alternative, "in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account" (1 Thessalonians 3:9).

One of the great challenges for the saint is keeping what is important as important, and keeping what is secondary as secondary. Whether it is suffering beatings and shame for the sake of Christ, or enduring jail time, or suffering loss of property, those things are secondary to the value of souls saved. The apostle Paul was able to understand the will and perspective of God, and thus experience great joy in the good news concerning the faithful brethren in Thessalonica!

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