

THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: DIRECTION FOR THE LAST DAYS

III. Handling Personal Opposition To Our Faith

(1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13)

I. Introduction

- A. Paul's epistles to the believers at Thessalonica addressed new converts out of raw paganism who faced persecution and false teaching, a recipe for spiritual defeat if they failed to get adequate spiritual insight.
- B. These needs are similar to what many believers face in today's godless world, so we view 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13 on handling personal opposition to our faith for our insight and edification (as follows):

II. Handling Personal Opposition To Our Faith, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13.

- A. In writing 1 Thessalonians, Paul was obviously concerned about having to leave Thessalonica after having just led his readers to faith in Christ, and that amid great persecution they faced for their faith, cf. Acts 17:1-10a.
- B. Accordingly, Paul wrote to provide encouragement and guidance for these new converts to Christ, and to our benefit, that encouragement and guidance is recorded for us in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13 (as follows):
 1. Paul informed his readers that God had worked in them to lead them to accept the Gospel that his ministry team had given them as indeed being the Word of God, not just the words of men, 1 Thessalonians 2:13.
 2. Paul added that this response fit the pattern of responses throughout Biblical history, 1 Thess. 2:14-16:
 - a. Paul encouraged his readers by informing them that their response was the same as that of believers in other churches they had never even met, that response being willingly to suffer persecution from their countrymen instead of abandoning their faith in Christ, 1 Thessalonians 2:14.
 - b. Indeed, these responses all fit the pattern of the persecution Christ faced from His countrymen who had in generations past slain their Old Testament prophets, building God's wrath against them, 1 Thess. 2:15-16.
 3. Paul encouraged his readers by telling how he had been anxious about their spiritual welfare as new converts facing persecution, which anxiety had increased in his being repeatedly blocked by Satan from returning to them, but that when he had sent Timothy back to them and Timothy had reported back to Paul of their abiding faith, how greatly this news had encouraged Paul and his ministry team, 1 Thess. 2:17-3:8.
 4. Thus, Paul prayed that these new converts might continue to be disciplined in the Lord, 1 Thess. 3:9-13:
 - a. Paul thanked God for the joy his ministry team experienced in hearing of the continued faith of his readers amid persecution though they were new and spiritually immature converts in Christ, 1 Thessalonians 3:9.
 - b. Paul continued praying that his team might be able to meet with these converts again and encourage them in their faith, trusting that God might direct their way to meeting these new converts, 1 Thess. 3:10-11.
 - c. The Apostle Paul added that he asked God that his readers' love might increase and abound for one another and for all men, just as the ministry team expressed their love for these believers, 1 Thess. 3:12.
 - d. The goal of this maturation of their spiritual love was to enhance their walk with Christ, 1 Thess. 3:13:
 - i. Paul asked that God "confirm, establish, strengthen" (*sterizo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 775) their inner man, 1 Thessalonians 3:13a.
 - ii. Paul asked that God confirm, establish, strengthen their inner man as "blameless" (*amemptos*, Ibid., p. 44), "that is, that after they sinned they would deal with it as God requires and so be free from any reasonable charge by their fellowmen," 1 Thessalonians 3:13b; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 700. Paul prayed that they handle the sin by confessing it to God for His forgiveness in order to sustain their testimonies. (1 John 1:8-10)
 - iii. Paul asked that God confirm, establish, strengthen his readers not only in being blameless, but in "holiness" (*hagiosune*, Ibid., p. 10), that they be "separated to God in their heart and habits" versus being polluted by the godlessness of the world, 1 Thess. 3:13c; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.

Lesson: Paul encouraged new converts in Christ who faced persecution for their faith by informing them (1) that their persistency in the faith indicated God's work in their conversions and lives, (2) that their persistency in the faith amid persecution fit a long Biblical pattern of such activity in God's people, (3) that their persistency in the faith encouraged and relieved Paul's ministry team and (4) that he prayed (a) thanking God for their persistency, (b) expressing hope of meeting these new converts to help them, (c) asking God for their love to grow for one another and for all people (d) and that (i) they would be strengthened in the inner man (ii) to be blameless in their testimony and (iii) separated from the ungodliness in the world while being devoted to God and His righteousness.

Application: May we handle opposition to our faith by applying Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13.