1 Thessalonians - Commentaries by Frederick George Patterson

Words of Truth: Volume 6, Faith, Hope and Love

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It is very striking to find that in every Epistle, with the exception of the Galatians, the Apostle gives thanks unceasingly to God for the saints to whom he writes, remembering them in his prayers night and day. His heart being with God, praise to Him is the first thing that rises up; though afterward he may have to instruct or rebuke or correct them in his letters. Thus, the heart being with God, gets at that which God gives.

In the case of the Galatians they had apparently got off the ground of justification by faith, so that he stands in doubt of them; and yet, after he has expressed his feelings of perplexity and sorrow at their state, we find his heart is still with God above the circumstances, enabling him to say, “I have confidence in you through the Lord.”

Now, this is just what we need in passing through the world. We must go through it, and God means that we should find it a place of trial and difficulty, that it may test our hearts, and teach us what He is to us under all.

It is important, however, to remember that all our exercises—I mean Christian exercises—follow complete and finished redemption. There are exercises in Egypt before we know redemption—making bricks without straw, and the taskmaster’s lash. But the Red Sea delivered God’s redeemed forever from Egypt, as we read in the song of Moses “Thou hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength to thy holy habitation.” The wilderness journey is not contemplated in this song. It is deliverance from Egypt, and God setting the redeemed in His inheritance.

So with us, our redemption in Christ has delivered us from the world and sin and death, and has brought us in Christ into the heavenly places. But, as a matter of fact, there is the wilderness to go through. God might have brought them into the land by a short way, but He led them round by the longer, “lest,” as He said, “peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.” (Ex. 13:17.) He counts the hairs of their heads. He thinks of what is best for them in every circumstance. After forty years they find their clothes have not waxed old, neither have their feet swelled. They had not thought of this till the journey was over, but their God had thought of their clothing every day. He had never omitted to rain manna upon them. True, He suffered them to hunger and thirst, to humble them and prove them, but only that He might supply their bread and their water for them. Through their unbelief they would not go into the land at the end of two years, and were turned back to wander thirty-eight years longer in the desert, but God turned back with them, and took not away from them His pillar of cloud by day, nor His pillar of fire by night.

It is thus that God deals with us in all the trials and difficulties of life. He means us to have trouble, and to feel the opposition of everything around to the life He has given us. What then we want, is to have the heart living with God, and then we shall have His mind about all our circumstances. Do you suppose that, if Israel had been thinking of God’s interest and care for them, they would have murmured as they did? Surely not. It does not matter what our troubles are. One may have the care of God’s people pressing on him; another the cares of the world; another, trouble in his family. Countless varieties of exercises there are, no doubt appointed by Him for His people; but the answer to every trouble is having the heart living with God above the circumstances.

Now, if we turn to the state of the Thessalonians, we shall see them bright and happy in the midst of most terrible persecutions. There is no epistle so happy as this. They are in what we call their first love. The springs of divine affections were bright in them. In the third verse we find faith, and hope, and love—that which constituted the full expression of grace working in the Christian—active in them. The Apostle remembers their work of faith, their labor of love, and their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, how far is it thus with you, dear friends? It is a blessed thing to work for the Lord. It is a great privilege to be allowed to have any service for Christ; but how far is it with you a work of faith? I do not mean to question sincerity. You may work for the Lord, and earnestly desire His blessing; but is every word you say uttered in direct faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus the expression of what your faith in Him is enjoying; or do you say what you know to be blessed truth, and what you desire God to bless; while the secret spring, that should link the work with your communion to Christ is gone? It is not that you may not have faith in the work. That may be all sure, and yet, in those inner springs of your spirit, your work may not be a work of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, you may labor abundantly, and you may love the labor, and do it willingly and honestly; but is the labor so completely the result of your own personal love to Christ, that it is really what these Thessalonians labor was, a “labor of love” But there was more than work and labor; there was also the condition of their hearts. They looked for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, not as a doctrine, but as the object of their affections. A mother looks for a son, who is to return from sea, not as a mere truth, but his return is in her heart. If it be delayed, can she settle down and say, “I have made a mistake,” and think no more of him? O no, she must exercise patience, but hers is the “patience of hope.” She may attend to her household duties as before—that is quite right—but where will her thoughts be? why, wondering when her son will be home. All truths in Scripture are persons or facts. People may say, “Why, you have talked of the Lord’s coming now for forty years, and He is not come yet.” Well, but that alters nothing. We look for Him, because we love Him, and wait to see Him and so we exercise the “patience of hope.” He is Himself waiting, and we wait with Him. We are companions in the patience of Jesus Christ. We know the reason of His delay. It is God’s long suffering in saving sinners; therefore we are not left in ignorance; but we cannot give up His return; to do so would make us the most miserable of all men. We find the “patience of hope” in our blessed Lord when in this world. He served and labored in faith and love to His Father; but He also waited for the coming glory; His life was the patience of hope.

But if we had not more than the work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope, the character of Christian walk would be very imperfect. In Christ there was perfect obedience. All His work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope was in obedience to God His Father. As He says in

John, “But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.” These Thessalonians did all “in the sight of God and our Father.” This obedience is most blessed, and yet it is a check upon us which we need, carrying about with us the evil we do. Their faith, hope, and love, sweet as they were in themselves, needed to be in the sight of God their Father, under His eye and done in obedience to Him.

Now of such the Apostle can speak as “knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” He knew it, not by God’s secret counsels, for none but God Himself thus knows it, but by the exhibition of His grace in them. He could see, indeed, that they were God’s elect. Of the Galatians he had to say, “I stand in doubt of you.” These Thessalonians he can rejoice in, as evidently chosen of God. When we see such blessed fruits of grace in any, how sweet it is to rejoice over them, and to know they are indeed God’s elect; while of others we can say nothing, but must stand in doubt of them, as Paul did of the Galatians. And this testimony not only rejoices the Apostle, but in every place their faith to God is spread abroad, so that he needs to say nothing about them. People exclaimed, What a wonderful thing has happened in Thessalonica! A man came there and preached to them, and a number of the people have turned to God and broken all their idols, and whatever you do to them, you cannot overcome them. They are so happy in what they believe, that even if you kill them, they do not mind, for they are waiting for a Son of God from heaven. No doubt their lips testified too, but their lives spoke, so that Paul had no need of saying what they were.

Is it so with you, beloved? Are you thus waiting for God’s Son from heaven, having turned to God from idols? and, whatever be your circumstances and trials, are you living above them in communion with God or are you happy in the world, whether Christ comes or not!

Words of Truth: Volume N2, The Patience of Hope

Oh! ‘tis all brightness yonder, no clouds nor din,

But joy, and peace, and gladness, and rest from sin;

Oh! ‘tis all glory yonder, for Christ is there,

In blest effulgence shining beyond compare.

And there’s no sorrow yonder, nor grief, nor pain;

They live to serve and worship the Lamb once slain;

And there’s no morrow yonder,—’tis one “to-day,”

There shines with fadeless splendor the Sun’s bright ray.

For Christ’s the Sun and sunshine of that bright place;

There we shall learn His glory, as here His grace;

And now we wait with patience His blessed will;

The stormy wind and tempest His word fulfill.

They’re servants of His pleasure, He bids them come;

Then by a word they’re silenced and all is calm

And we shall reach in safety the moment bright,

When we shall see His beauty in radiant light.

And if meanwhile He calls us to face the storm,

His shepherd care surrounds us, and His strong arm

Shall guide us through in safety the long dark night,

Till earth-born clouds shall vanish in morning light.

E. C.

Words of Truth: Volume N3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

It was a happier task for the apostle to write to the Thessalonian saints on the subject of the resurrection than to the Corinthians. The need at Corinth arose from the speculative, free, reasoning intellect of a Greek. The Corinthians opposed difficulties to the mystery of the resurrection, very much in the spirit of a Sadducee. The apostle instructs them, it is true. Surely he did—for his was the pen of the gracious, forbearing and patient Spirit of God. But he answers them with much of righteous rebuke and anger—instructs them with a witness against their own condition of soul (1 Cor. 15). But it is not so in 1 Thess. 4. The Thessalonians were not opposing science of reasoning to the mystery. They were in sorrow because of their sleeping brethren, knowing not what to think of that state, whether they might not lose the coming of Christ for which they on the earth were waiting.

It was wounded and tried affection that appealed to the apostle in them; it was human, carnal reasoning that challenged the apostle in the Corinthians. Therefore the apostle delighted to answer the Thessalonians, and he does so without a single rebuke, but hastens to comfort them, to tell them not to sorrow as if there were no hope respecting them that were sleeping, for that there was no feature of joy or glory that was reserved from them at the coming of Christ that would not be shared by their departed brethren. Jesus would bring them with Him. They would rise from their graves ere anything was done with their brethren who were then living. They would then ascend together with the living to meet the Lord in the air on His descent from heaven. And finally, all, whether quick or asleep, would after that forever be with Jesus.

Here was comfort without the thought of a rebuke. Here was full sympathy without the least resentment. Here was pouring in fresh light and instruction, in the joy of the Teacher for the sake of His disciples. Hope was established in their souls, and more than the breach that was in their spirit was repaired.

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