

2 Thessalonians 1:3

Introduction

In this verse Paul praises God because the faith of the Thessalonians has grown, and their love towards each other abounds. These were his spiritual children, since he founded the church at Thessalonica, so he took particular pleasure in the news of their growth.

We should always be pleased when we hear of the growth and expansion of God's work, whether we are involved or not, but undoubtedly there is special pleasure when we are involved, e.g. someone we have led to the Lord, a Sunday School pupil we have taught, a bible study group we have commenced.

Here the text is concerned with the growth in faith of these people. There are problems when faith is small. We are going to consider the way in which faith may grow, and the result of this.

Problems of small faith

Faith normally begins with a small amount. The new convert simply rests on Christ, with much ignorance and many doubts. He just knows his need, and lays hold of Christ. He finds that Christ is suitable and perfectly able to grant salvation. We are all meant to begin at this point, but we are not meant to stay there. However, some get no further than this.

Consider some of the characters in Pilgrim's Progress, and how little faith they had. And so today in many congregations, there are those who fall at the same hurdles. Though salvation may be real even if faith is small, there are many problems. E.g. lack of assurance, lack of comfort in the certainty of heaven. The person with little faith feels he is too unworthy, fears he will not be able to keep going to the end, and doubts his salvation.

The Christian with little faith will not be able to do much for God because he lacks confidence in God and His power. He will be easily daunted by troubles and trials. He will question God's promises are for him, and will quickly and easily fall into sin. His will be an experience of many nights and few days, long winters and short summers, much mourning and little rejoicing.

Ways in which faith may grow

Faith must be fed in order to grow. Faith is fed through the promises of God's word. This contains promises of things which are not seen and which are eternal. It is helpful to take a promise each day, and take it with us wherever we go, to read it and to learn it. Luther described it like this: "When I get hold of a promise I look upon it as I would a fruit tree. The fruits are above my head, and if I would get them I must shake the tree to and fro." So to take a promise and meditate on it is like shaking the tree to and fro so that the fruit falls into our hands. Turn the text over and over until

the meaning is clear. Then prove the promise for yourself. It may be a promise of guidance, or provision, or strength. Put it to the test. Some people put “T&P”, “tried and proved” in the margins of their Bible to help them be assured of the goodness and faithfulness of God’s promises.

Nothing in the world can confirm faith like proof. The older we become, the stronger our faith ought to be, because we have so many proofs to buttress our faith. Every instance of God’s love should make us believe Him more and more.

Faith also grows as we associate with godly people and experienced Christians. It is reassuring to realize that our temptations are not peculiar to us, but that they are very much known to the mature and experienced Christian also. It is strengthening to speak of shared spiritual experiences.

Often it is in times of trouble that our faith grows. There is not much growth in the days when the sun shines. Old oaks develop deep roots because of the pressure of the March winds upon them. Storms and tempests give us spiritual strength, which we will never know otherwise. Someone once said, “When I used to be in poverty and trouble, God’s Word was much sweeter to me than it is now that I have prospered.” Alas this is the experience of many. This is why Luther described “affliction” as “the best book in the library”.

There is also the place of prayer and meditation in building up our faith. If we need faith – ask for it. Dwell on and think about heavenly matters. Take time over these things – don’t just try to fit it in amongst the rush and busyness of life.

Attainments to which faith may rise

We will never reach the point when doubts no longer rise, yet we may have sufficient faith to give assurance of our acceptance. We should be able to say, “I know whom I have believed”. We should also have the faith to be content at being cast on God’s providence, with little concern for our temporal state. We should attain quiet confidence in God about temporal and eternal interests, and stand firmly on the rock of confidence. Our faith should enable us to defy death and its sting. We should have confidence that all things work together for good.

When we reach this point, our faith becomes the centre of other graces. When faith is present, love grows. Someone once said, “If God had not chosen His people before they were born, He would never have done so afterwards”! It can be hard to love some people. But the stronger our faith is, the more we love them for Christ’s sake.

Faith will also quicken our endeavours and our prayers. It helps us to remain steadfast when people around us are falling. A faithful church is a blessing to the district around.

We need to pray for and practice this faith. Exercise what faith we have. Then it grows. Cultivate what we have, and then we can go on to higher things. Begin small. Begin with something you believe God can answer. George Muller, after 60 years, said he “could as easily trust God for £1,000,000 as at the beginning he trusted God for a few rolls for breakfast.” Begin small. Begin with what you believe. Do not ask

for things you do not think or believe He can answer. Ask for things according to the measure of your faith.

This can be the beginning of a marvellous new life, and completely new level in your Christian experience. A new relationship with God. Faith can touch our health, money and family problems. This can be done as we daily exercise our faith. Faith is not just meant to be discussed, or admired, or criticized. It is meant to be practiced.