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A1104 – January 23, 2011 – 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10
Timothy's Report

Last time we saw in 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Paul taught that all Christians are called to suffer. In verse 3 he says, "for you yourselves know that we had been appointed for this." And likewise Dr. Barnhouse reminds us that Paul taught Timothy, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). And Paul told the Philippians, "It is given to us on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on his name, but to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). They got this teaching from Jesus who taught His disciples, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take courage I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). So you can be sure that if you stand up for Jesus Christ in this godless world you will have tribulation. There is no guarantee in Scripture that the Christian can escape the trials and tribulations and persecutions of life. But, the Scriptures do teach that the Christian will escape the trials and tribulations of the day of the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul writes, "Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." The wrath to come is the day of the Lord. And in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 Paul writes, "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." And so we can easily discern two classes of tribulation: the tribulations which are the lot of all Christians and the tribulations which are the lot of non-Christians, the day of the Lord. They radically differ and this is very clearly one of the major teachings of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and are indeed the clearest epistles on the subject. And we have much more to see about these truths.

Now, we concluded last time by pointing out that Paul and Silas in the city of Athens had reached a point when their separation from the Thessalonians was too much to bear any longer so they sent Timothy. To understand the separation that led to this frustration you can liken it as Paul did in 2:17 to a child being orphaned from his parents. And how difficult it must be for the

child who knows the comforts and security of his parents to be ripped away from them and unable to return; the unknowns, questions, the constant wondering and this Paul says is the emotion he and Silas felt toward the Thessalonians. Or you might think of the great story of the German POW in World War II who was taken to the prison camps in Siberia, most of whom never returned, but a book was written about one German soldier, I think it's titled, *as far as my feet will carry me*, and in that book this German soldier tells his story of being taken into captivity in Siberia and finding a way of escape and how he survived and finally, after nine years, made it back home to his family. Or if you had a son or daughter in the military and you are separated from them and you cannot inquire of them and you don't know what's going on, what missions their platoon is involved in, what dangers they may be facing, that whole set of the unknowns is what led to Paul and Silas being unable to endure it any longer. So they sent Timothy. They were locked out. Timothy was not locked out. And so it's at this point that Timothy is injected into the ministry. Timothy, up to this point, was a disciple of Paul and Silas. He had been in training during this missionary journey but now he's going to be the missionary. And his mission is to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith; which means he's going to teach them the word of God. He's going to teach them the Bible doctrine he learned from Paul and Silas. This is the way it is. Nobody starts off Mr. Original, Mr. Fresh, Mr. Know it all, you start off a student, you grow to be a master. So we have a new man in the ministry, Timothy, and he's going to become a great pastor and teacher of the word of God.

Now in verse 5 we have another reason Paul and Silas sent Timothy, "I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain." In other words, Paul wanted to know what is going on with your faith? Not what is going on with the weather? Who won the ball game? What is going on spiritually? The tempter no doubt had tempted them but how had their faith fared? Had they fallen to the tempter? If they had fallen to the tempter then this would have destroyed Paul's labor and Paul never wanted his labor to be destroyed. Paul wanted his labor to bear fruit. So here Paul is about to go crazy not knowing. I've got to know. So they sent Timothy to find out.

In verse 6 Timothy returns with the report. **But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and**

love, so it's a good report, **and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also longed to see you, 7 for this reason, brethren, and all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.** First, Paul, in verse 6, the Greek text actually says, "And just now Timothy has come to us from you," Timothy had just arrived. We know the year was A.D. 51 but we don't know exactly what time of year, though some scholars may have a general idea. The point is that when Timothy arrived and reported to Paul, Paul sat down immediately and wrote 1 Thessalonians. So that's the exact historical context this epistle was written out of. It was written in response to Timothy's report.

And verse 6 tells us it was a great report. How would you like to get a great report? The Lord Jesus Christ gives a report on seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. And only one of those churches gets a great report. The Lord Jesus Christ, like a DI goes through the seven churches of Asia and picks this out and picks that out. And only one church came out as clean as a whistle - the church of Philadelphia. And so Thessalonica was on par with Philadelphia. They were as clean as a whistle. Notice what Paul says, **Timothy brought us good news of your faith and love**, the participle **good news** is the same word used of the gospel, it means to bear good news, to bring good news. It was a gospel that Timothy brought to the ears of Paul and Silas. And if I were taken away from you, if I were ripped from this church body and I sent someone to check on your faith then I would want to have them come back to me and report a gospel like this. A gospel that included four things: your strong faith, your love, your kind remembrance of me and your longing to see me. That's the fourfold gospel in verse 6.

The first gospel that Paul and Silas heard about the Thessalonians is their **faith**. Their faith has not faltered when tempted by the evil one. Their faith had remained strong. What doctrine they had learned they had applied to their tribulations and their faith had overcome the evil one.

The second gospel that Paul and Silas heard about the Thessalonians is their **love**. Their love for one another had not faltered, it had abounded. Their love for one another had grown in the midst of tribulations.

The third gospel that Paul and Silas heard about the Thessalonians is **that you always think kindly of us**, or better rendered "you have a good memory of us at all times," in other words, they continually recounted the times they spent with Paul and Silas. They had good memories of Paul and Silas.

The fourth gospel that Paul and Silas heard about the Thessalonians is their longing to see them. And so it was not a one-sided desire on the part of Paul and Silas to see the Thessalonians. It was double-sided; the Thessalonians also longed to see Paul and Silas.

Now, the participle longing is again a word of strong emotion and desire as this whole section is chock full of words of emotion. Paul has been very emotional since Chapter 2:17. Commentators point out this is Paul's most emotional text. Now there is a right emotion and a wrong emotion. Right emotion is emotion that is controlled by a biblical framework of thinking. Our emotions must be under the constraints of biblical teaching. It is fine to have feelings but feelings can be wrong if they are out of balance with biblical teaching. In chapter 4 we'll learn there is a proper way for a Christian to grieve when a loved one is lost. We do not grieve as the world. There is a way the world grieves and that is not the way the Christian is to grieve. The way the world grieves is wrong, the way the Christian is to grieve is right. And the difference is that the world grieves in the context of hopelessness versus the Christian who grieves in the context of hope, the hope of resurrection and re-gathering with all the saints. Not I hope so but I know so. Christ is risen! So, the right or the wrong grief stems from a way of thinking about reality, which is one's doctrine. Our emotions and feelings must be constrained by biblical doctrine. And if our emotions and feelings get outside of the constraints of this absolute reference point then our emotions and feelings are wrong.

There are some commentators who question whether all of Paul and Silas' emotions are right in this passage. Obviously some of their emotions are not wrong. But there is a question as to the intensity of some of the emotions expressed. For example, when Paul says, in verse 1 and 5, we could endure it no longer, commentators point out, now aren't they being anxious? You can call it "concern" or whatever but 10 years later he will write, "Be anxious about nothing," (Philippians 4:6). You can argue, well Paul was just

concerned about them, but I think it's all a cover up. Paul was anxious. Paul had not learned to tame his anxiety. Paul had not learned to cast all his cares upon Him. Paul had to grow spiritually just like any other Christian. Paul did not start off the Christian life with total perfection. Paul had to run the race just like you and I have to run the race. And Paul says in his latter years that he did finish the course, he kept the faith. But remember Paul's epistles are written over a period of about 15 years. And during those years Paul matured. When we look at Paul's writings we divide them into three categories: infancy, childhood and adulthood. Thessalonians happens to fall in the infancy category. And this is where we observe Paul at a more immature time in his life.

And one of the characteristics of being an immature Christian is you're very emotional. Again, not that all of his emotion is wrong, it's just that you can get overemotional and here we see Paul overemotional and as you read Paul's writings into the adulthood section you'll see he becomes much less emotional and more stable. You'll see he's able to relax because he will have learned to trust the Lord over greater and greater areas of life. You just can't grow up in a minute. It takes a lifetime. One of the trends that we will see as we move through Paul's infancy writings is his great emotion, but as we move into the childhood and adulthood writings will see less emotion and more stability. So I point out at this time Paul and Silas were just not able to be anxious about nothing. They had tremendous anxiety about the Thessalonians and how they were doing. They just couldn't handle it any longer. They had to know. And this is sort of a barometer for measuring your spirituality. If you're one of those people that just cannot relax until you know, you have just got to have the data now and until you get the data you can't relax, well then that's indicating your immaturity as a Christian. You're not able to cast your cares upon Him, you're anxious about all kinds of things. You can't trust, you can't relax, and you just drive yourself mad and everyone else around you. And the excuse you use to cover up this infant behavior is to say well I'm just concerned, I'm not worried, I'm concerned. And it's a whole lot of hot air and baloney talk and everybody else can see right through you so don't bother trying to cover up.

Notice verse 7, and again look at the intensity of emotion. **For this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about**

you through your faith; look at that. In all our distress and affliction. Boy, you would think it's the end the world. The only good thing about it is we can all identify with Paul just like all the other scriptural writers were real people not plaster saints. Now, Paul was in Corinth. He says we were distressed and afflicted. This came about because Europe was not a promising mission. Years later Paul didn't get goosebumps when he thought about this mission. It wasn't a warm and fuzzy mission. The influence of Jewish culture was practically nil. Paganism was rampant. Europe did not appear to be any great success. Paul was wondering whether he should remain in Europe or just go back to Antioch. As Dr. Ryrie says in his commentary, Paul "had just suffered four successive experiences of apparent defeat since he set foot in Europe. At Philippi he had been cast in jail and asked to leave the city. At Thessalonica he had been forced to leave and to guarantee that he would not return. At Berea he was pursued by the Jews and compelled to move on. At Athens he had had little success with the philosophers of the city. Surely he was in affliction and distress and this news meant strength and life to him. It brought to him a revival of energy which was not a passing thing but a continual source of inspiration." Again, I would emphasize that while emotion is not wrong, the intensity of emotion revealed here is one of a more immature Paul than we will find later. Later Paul will learn to be anxious about nothing. But at this time he was unable to do that. It just takes time to grow to be able to trust over greater and greater areas. And Paul was no different than any other believer in this respect. He had to grow spiritually just as you and I have to grow spiritually, just as the Thessalonians had more growing to do spiritually. No matter how well they were doing at the close of the chapter we will see that Paul encourages them to grow even more. Chapter 3 and on into chapter 4 are all about Sanctification, growing spiritually.

Now, verse 8, **for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.** In the Greek text this is a 1st class condition meaning a condition of reality. And therefore it should not be translated, **if you stand firm**, but "since you stand firm." The Thessalonians were standing firm in the Lord and therefore Paul and Silas were really living. What is it to really live? It is to enjoy the eternal life which God has given you. There are three aspects of eternal life. First, there is the possession of eternal life which becomes our possession at the moment of faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone who believes that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again has received

eternal life as a possession and can never lose it. That's why they call it eternal life. But then, second, there is also the enjoyment of eternal life. Jesus calls this the abundant life. He said, "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly." To have life is to possess it; to have it abundantly is to enjoy it. Sorry to say it but not all believers enjoy the eternal life they possess. You've seen the doom and gloom Christians. Every thing is wrong, bad day, bad week, bad life. And they go around trying to pull every other Christian down into the doom and gloom because they can't stand a Christian enjoying anything. And it's true we may be in difficult circumstances, we may be under trial and tribulation, but an abiding believer can still enjoy the abundant life. And finally, third, there is even more than the possession of eternal life and the enjoyment of eternal life, there is our final attainment of it when we are resurrected and we sin no more. What a day that will be. The quality of life we will enjoy then will be far greater than anything we could enjoy here and now. So, just as there are three phases of sanctification so there are three phases of eternal life. And you just have to go to the context in which "life" or "eternal life" is used to discover which of the three phases is being referred to. But you can't be so naïve as to think that every time you see "eternal life" in the Scriptures it's referring to something you either possess or don't possess, heaven and hell talk. It's not. And in this context it refers to phase 2 of eternal life, Paul and Silas' enjoyment of eternal life.

So in verse 6 we have the fourfold gospel Timothy preached- their strong faith, their love, their fond remembrance of Paul and Silas, and their longing to see them. In verse 7 we have the fact that they were down in Corinth but encouraged by this report. And in verse 8 the Thessalonians were standing firm; they were enjoying the eternal life they possessed. Before this they just couldn't trust that everything was going to be alright. Now they got the data, now they could rest and enjoy their eternal life.

Now we come to verses 9 and 10. Verse 9, **For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?** In verse 9 Paul says it's impossible for us to re-pay God for what He has done in our lives. Remember, we said last time that Paul had to learn this lesson that when he leaves his converts the security of their faith does not rest in him, but in God the Holy Spirit. He had to learn to

leave his converts in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Now you may not think it's a very difficult thing to do but it is a very difficult thing to do. Most people don't understand the pastor's heart unless they have the gift of pastor. Just like someone who has the gift of pastor may not understand the helper's heart. Or someone who has the gift of helper may not understand the administrator's heart. Which shows it's very dangerous to go around saying well I just don't think so and so is administrating very properly. Well, maybe they don't think you're helping very properly.

In any case, here we have the pastor's heart and the pastor's heart is for his spiritual children. And when he finds out they're doing well it brings him almost ineffable joy. The only thing I can relate the pastor's heart toward his spiritual children is to think of a mother's heart toward her children. Do you know how difficult it is to separate a mother from her children? Do you know what goes on in a mother's heart? That's what goes on in the pastor's heart when he is separated from his spiritual children. Now, it has to be tamed. You can't just go to pieces. But that gives you the sense of difficulty and it gives you the sense of Paul's gratitude to God for taking care of his children while he was separated from them. It's the same gratitude a mother would feel toward someone who took care of her children while she was separated from them.

And that's what Paul says, it's just impossible God for me to pay you back. The joy over what you've done is so great! We're so appreciative we can never pay you back. So Paul gives God all the credit here. God, you did it, you kept them safe when the tempter came, you helped them stand firm, God, you get the glory. And more and more Paul is going to learn this lesson - that when he is separated from his converts God takes care of his converts. Look at us; we're here almost 2000 years later, an extension of Paul's European ministry. Is God taking care of Paul's converts? It's impossible to, in human terms, quantify the impact of Christianity on the Western world. But here we are and the credit can only go to one place. Not Paul, not Silas, not Timothy, but God. God alone. Jesus Christ said, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church." And here we are today.

But that does not stop Paul and Silas in verse 10 from wanting to return to the Thessalonians and complete the training. Remember, last week we said Paul's missionary method was to evangelize, follow up quickly with training,

and then leave. A three-fold method. Paul didn't get to finish his three-fold method. I want to go back!

Now observe the intensity of Paul's prayer life. See in this area Paul is manifesting maturity and that's another point. In some areas he is manifesting immaturity, in other areas he is manifesting maturity. And that's the normal progress of the Christian. We're all in transition. We can be mature in some areas and immature in other areas. We don't grow at the same rate in every area of life. And some areas you may grow very rapidly in and think to be a very easy area to master may be for someone else a very slow area of growth and very difficult to master. We don't all grow at the same rates or in the same areas of the Christian life. And so we can't run around judging everybody on the basis of well in this area they just really blew it and therefore I write them off as a total failure in the Christian life, if they're even a Christian. Paul had areas of immaturity and maturity. He was weak in the area of anxiety but he was strong in the area of prayer.

Verse 10, **As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and make complete what is lacking in your faith?**

Now there are three indications in this verse that the prayer being referred to is not your normal run-of-the-mill prayer, Oh Lord will you do this. And we know this because first of all we have a word used of prayer that is atypical. Usually it's the word *proseuchomai*, that's the normal prayer; a typical prayer. But this word is *deomai* which is a stronger word, it expresses a feeling of need, of lacking something. And when you are in intense need of something this is the word that's used for your prayer. So first, the use of the word *deomai* signals an intense prayer. Second, he says **night and day**, not only in the day, but night and day. Paul's not talking about a specific prayer time, but he's talking about praying all the time, night and day. All the time I pray this. He can't get it off his mind. And third, the NASB translates it **most earnestly** but the actual word is *uperekperissou* and is the word for super-abundantly. It means a lot. A big long word like that just means, a whole lot.

To see it in another prayer context turn to Ephesians 3:20. Paul in this passage just finished one of his great prayers. We will see Paul, when he writes letters, will often break off into prayer in the middle of the letter. He'll write his prayer into a letter. That's how strong Paul was in this area. He

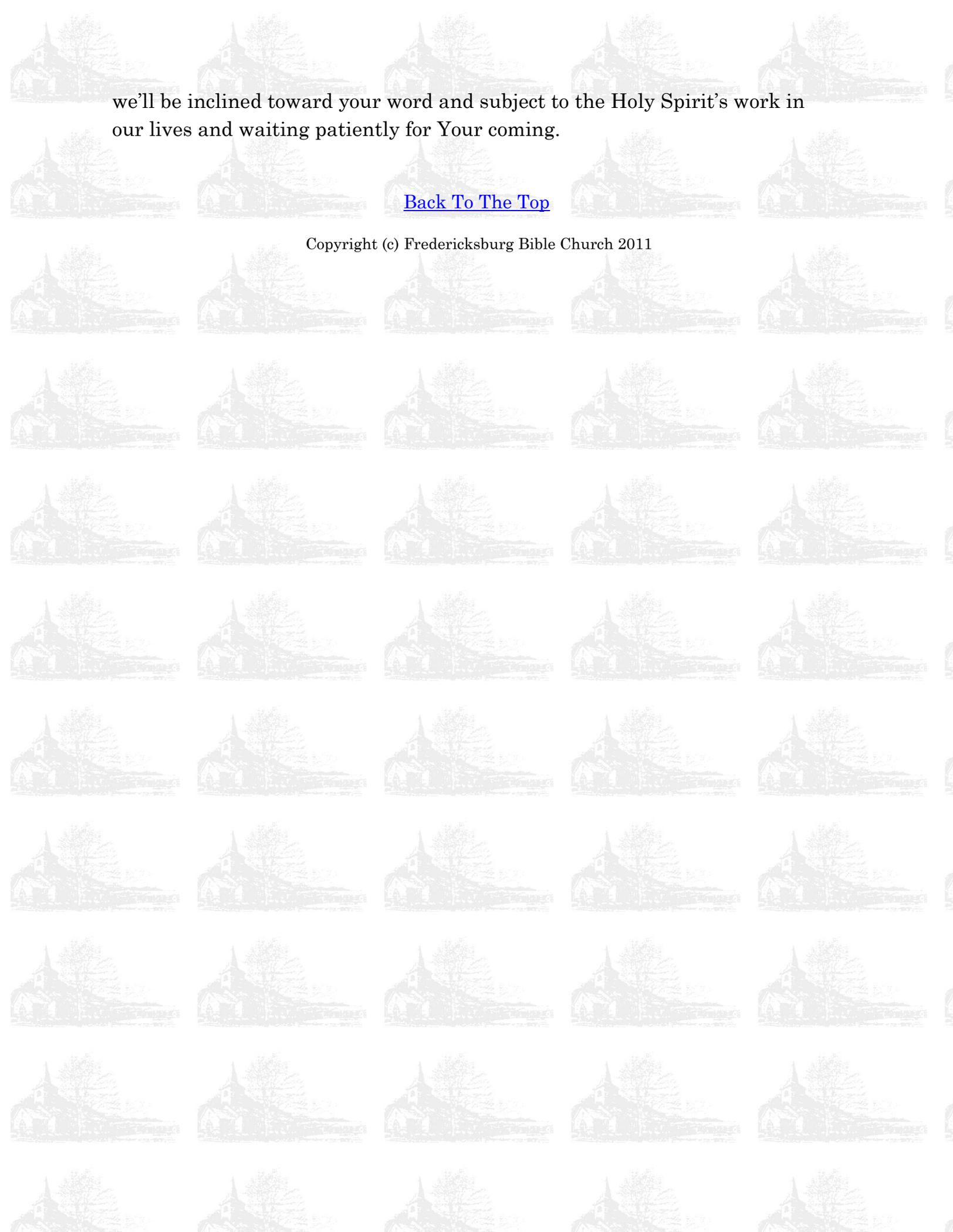
just put everything to prayer. He might be in a conversation with you and in the middle he might just start praying and you'd think, now, wait a minute, what happened there that he's gone into prayer. And what happened was something crossed Paul's mind and Paul didn't want to forget about it so he just prayed right there. Now most of us would think that Paul is a strange bird. And Paul probably was a strange bird. But it's hard to get upset with people who pray. And here's the close of one of Paul's prayers in Ephesians chapter 3. He says in verse 20, "now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think," there's our word, here translated *far more abundantly beyond*, and you're using a different connection with prayer. Namely, God's attributes that go in and behind the scenes to answer our prayer. What attribute makes Him able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think? His omnipotence. He's able to answer the prayer. It's not a problem for Him. The problem is for us coming up with a prayer that is too convoluted for Him to answer. We can't do that because God has another attribute called omniscience which means that he already knows everything. But let's go back to Thessalonians because that gives you the sense of this word Paul uses of his prayers. Not only night and day, but super abundantly, referring to the amount of prayer that he offered on their behalf. Paul prayed and prayed and prayed. And I suspect we'd have a whole lot less to do if we just put it to prayer and leave it to God. Super abundantly spend our time there and let God take care of it. Boy, what might happen if we just prayed about it rather than coming up with another dumb solution.

Now that we've seen how Paul prayed and how much Paul prayed let's look at the two things that Paul prayed for. In verse 10, he first prayed **that we may see your face**. Paul still wanted to see them. Paul had been locked out of Thessalonica, he had been satanically hindered. But that didn't mean Paul said, well, I'm not going to pray for God to take me back because Satan already blocked me. No, God is bigger than Satan and if God's wants to remove that hindrance then He can do it. And the second thing Paul prayed for, which is related to the first, is that **we make complete what is lacking in your faith**. In other words, when we get there we want to finish the training. Paul had not been able to teach them the whole counsel of God in only 1 or 2 months. He needed about 6 months to teach the whole counsel of God. And so he wanted to return to be able to complete the rigors of this training, so they can complete their basic training in the word of God. Paul

expected to be able to give believers the basics of the whole counsel of God in about 6 months. And he saw it is as a necessary foundation. Paul did not believe in going in and just evangelizing people and then leaving them. Paul believed that you evangelize people and then you follow up quickly with training. Otherwise you leave them open for assault by the evil one. And so Paul would lay a firm doctrinal foundation which basically constituted what we're doing in our biblical framework. Paul was very concerned about teaching the whole counsel of God to believers; expecting all believers to have a good grasp of a whole counsel of God not just a couple verses. And so he prays that God will remove the Satanic hindrance, enabling him to return and see their face and complete the doctrinal training regimen that he was unable to complete during his first visit.

In conclusion, what can we take away from all of this? We can take away a number of things. For one we can take away the importance of a pastor's heart and being grateful when he finds that his children are walking in the faith truth and in love. There is no greater joy than this for a pastor. Secondly, I think we can take away the fact that believers are sanctified experientially in different areas at different rates. Some of us do not have much of a problem, for example with over-emoting and getting all in a ball of wax every time something bad happens. Other believers have a severe problem with this, it's an area struggle for them and they've yet to mature in this area. But then there are those of us who are very immature in the area of prayer, we couldn't pray for 5 min. if somebody had a gun to our head. It's just something that we really struggle with. Or some of us may be very mature in the area of giving. We just enjoy it. And others of us just can't drop that dime. The third thing we can take away is that Paul is a tremendous example of prayer. If we were to devote ourselves to prayer then there is no telling what God would do. As James says, "you do not have because you do not ask."

So Lord we come to you in prayer and we ask you to teach us to pray, let us be praying people, we all are immature in areas and we need to mature, we pray for that, help us grow up in Christ and put aside the nonsense, and we thank you that you are able to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. We're impressed that You can actually take these old broken clay pots called people and make something wonderful out of each one of us. We thank you for that and we pray we'll be moldable in Your hands, that



we'll be inclined toward your word and subject to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and waiting patiently for Your coming.

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