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Introduction: In this short and very plain chapter, Paul expresses his great care for the faith of the Thessalonian Christians. And in so doing, the precious and even sometimes fragile nature of our faith is brought to light. There are many things that can assail and undermine the faith of Christians, especially new Christians. There are the lusts and inclinations of our old nature, the general cares of this life (which can seem overwhelming at times), persecutions and assaults from the enemies of the faith, and even false doctrine and divisions that can creep up from within. Paul, and the people he preached Christ to, encountered all of these things. And because he had spent so little time at Thessalonica, he seems particularly relieved to learn of the steadfastness of their young faith.

1. Verses 1-5 - Precious Faith and Strength to Endure

- vv.1-2 - **Timothy** was sent from Athens to **establish** and **encourage** them. To establish (Gr., *sterizo*) is to nail something down (figuratively speaking), to make it immovable. To encourage, as used here (Gr., *parakaleo*), is to comfort, perhaps in the context here of enduring the trials that come commonly to new believers. And so you see that the faith of Christians is something that *needs to be nurtured*. It needs attention. New believers especially - but to some extent all believers - need that constant grounding in the faith and encouragement to stand and endure. We find that through various spiritual disciplines (study of the word and much prayer for each other especially) and through fellowship, sound doctrine, mutual love and care, etc. *We must attend to these things diligently* if our faith is going to endure, grow, and produce fruit for the glory of God. Timothy was gifted with the word and with teaching; God still uses this mightily in the lives of His children.

- vv.3-4 - Paul's struggles might have discouraged some, but he reminds them that this is part of his calling.

- v.5 - A personal word from Paul as to why he sent Timothy: to establish and encourage, but also to learn of their welfare.

2. Verses 6-8 - Joy in the Faith of Others

- vv.6-7 - The **good news** of the Thessalonian Christians' steadfastness **comforted** Paul & Co. One way a Christian's faith is encouraged is by witnessing the growth and strong faith of a brother or sister. We should always look for this. And likewise (though not in this passage specifically) we should emulate the strong faith of our more mature brothers and sisters in Christ. NOTE ALSO the great longing the Christians have for one another here. Godly, holy fellowship should be highly cherished, protected and diligently pursued. Encouragement happens there.

- v.8 - **For now we live...** An expression of relief from Paul; he was relieved to learn of their state.

3. Verses 9-10 - Constant Prayer for the Growth of Faith

- v.9 - Paul was thankful to **God** and full of joy before Him; this prompted him to pray (v.10). We should remember God in all things and pray constantly.

- v.10 - **...night and day praying exceedingly...** What a great example of devotion to God! This reveals four important elements in Paul's prayer: 1) thanksgiving (v.9); 2) joy (v.9); 3) desire for fellowship; and 4) a desire to continue to teach and strengthen them.

- NOTE: Verses 9-10 are in the form of a rhetorical question which might modernly be quipped, "how can I thank God enough for this?"

4. Verses 11-13 - Fruits of Mature Faith: Love and Holiness

- v.11 - Expressed as a prayer to God, Paul asks that God would **direct** his **way** to them. He longs to be with them.

- v.12 - Part of his prayer is that these Christians have the same love among one another that he has for them. In fact, he wants them to **increase and abound** in it. Love is the ultimate expression of the Christian faith. Biblical love is bulletproof. This goes well beyond tenderhearted feelings for one another, though that is certainly part of the picture. Paul's love for them prompted action. He endured persecution to initially preach the gospel to them, prayed constantly for them, longed to be present with them to teach and establish them, dispatched Timothy to them to both share with and learn of them, wrote two letters of encouragement and instruction to them, etc. Biblical love *does* things. It *acts*. We should abound in works of love towards one another. We should pray for one another, care for one another, look after one another, share with one another (in both material and spiritual things), serve Christ alongside one another, etc.

- v.13 - Note the critical connection between love (v.12) and holiness. If we abound in love, which certainly is always in the will of God, He will **establish** our **hearts blameless in holiness**. This prepares us for the **coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Do you desire to be holy? You should. When we act in a godly, selfless love, we are being firmly planted by God as holy. Paul's prayer was that these Christians be blameless and holy, and abounding in love certainly promotes that.

- NOTE: **...the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints**. This sets up the instruction Paul gives in the following chapter concerning the "Rapture"

Conclusion: Our faith in Jesus Christ is the most precious thing we have, and it itself is a gift from God. Think of it as a stewardship: it needs care, it needs attention, it needs to be managed. We should diligently apply ourselves to the things with strengthen our faith and cause it to endure. We will be fruitful unto the Lord if we do, producing much love and holiness.