

# Faith Growing

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[ 0 : 00 ] We shall now turn to the passage which we read together, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. We shall consider this evening verse 3.

2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 3. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.

You can see from this passage that Paul is delighted at the way the faith of the Thessalonians is growing. You remember that in the first epistle which he wrote to the Thessalonians, in chapter 3 and verse 10, he longed to be amongst the Thessalonians, to see their face again, to impart some good gift to them, so that their faith would grow.

He was praying for the Thessalonians, that their faith would grow. And you see from chapter 3 verse 12, that he was praying that their love would grow too.

And now, writing some weeks later, perhaps some months later, he is seeing that his prayers have been answered.

[ 1 : 42 ] He is praising God that their faith has grown, and that their love has also grown. This second epistle was written after the messengers who had gone with the first epistle, probably Timothy and Silas, after they had returned, shortly after that, this second epistle was written in order to correct some of the things that were wrong in the church of Thessalonica.

Their faith was growing. What about you? I wonder, is your faith growing? Well, do you have faith in the first place?

That, of course, is even more basic. You must have faith in order for that faith to grow. And I wonder, is your faith being displayed through love?

Can it be seen in your life? Do your works show what is in your heart and your relationship to God? That is basically the message that we have before us here tonight. First of all, in looking at this verse, I would like us to ask the question, what is faith?

[ 3 : 16 ] Many people say they have faith. And indeed, everyone has a kind of faith. If you don't have a kind of faith, then your situation is one of despair.

It's one of deep depression. If you have no faith, you're in a hopeless situation. You have no one to turn to. No one on whom you can rely.

Nothing to which you can look. Nothing that will give you comfort. Your situation is truly miserable. It's suicidal. Most people have faith.

But what do they have faith in? Many people have faith in money or in their job or in their husband or their wife or their parents or their children.

They have faith in their friends, faith in their home, faith in their hobbies or whatever else it might be that these things can give to them life and can give to them happiness and can give to them satisfaction.

[ 4 : 23 ] That these things can satisfy the deepest needs they have. These are the things that thrill them. But do we have a faith that is properly grounded?

a faith that is worthwhile, that is valuable. Not faith in something that will pass away, something that cannot help us in the time of our need.

Do we have faith in a God that doesn't exist? Or do we have faith in the living God, the true God, the God of the Bible? Oh, you say, I have faith in the God of the Bible.

I believe the things that are in the Bible. But then, even when we talk about that faith, we must remember that the devils believe and tremble.

Yes, you say, I believe in God. I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in the Creator. I believe that Jesus died and died for sinners on the cross.

[ 5 : 32 ] But the devils believe these things too. true saving faith is not just a matter of believing certain facts.

What is saving faith? Well, the first thing that we notice about faith is that it's a saving grace. It's a gift from God. It's something that God gives us. It's not something purely human. Oh yes, faith is something we do. We are to believe. If we don't believe, we won't be saved. We must believe. And yet, faith is not something purely human. It is the gift of God. It is grace that works faith in our lives. It is God's Spirit that moves us and enables us and convinces us and assures us so that we do believe.

[ 6 : 41 ] Faith is something then that comes from God. That God works in our soul. We mustn't trust in ourselves. We mustn't think that we can do it.

But we must realize that we've got to depend totally upon the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who saves us. He alone is able to save us.

We need the Spirit's help. That's the first thing then about faith. Secondly, faith involves, true saving faith, involves an awareness of sin and of guilt.

we must be aware that we are unworthy of God's mercy. That we don't deserve to be saved. That there's nothing good in us that would merit salvation. That we cannot earn heaven. It's vital for us to realize this.

[ 7 : 46 ] we must realize that we are sinners. Otherwise, we can't have saving faith. Saving faith is the sinner reaching out to the Savior.

The person who has come to appreciate his lost condition. Who has realized that he is in need. That he is in danger of eternal wrath.

So, faith involves an awareness of sin. A consciousness of our own guilt.

Our unworthiness before God. Further, thirdly, faith is linked to repentance. Saving faith is a penitent faith.

And true Christian repentance is a faithful repentance. Faith and repentance cannot be divided. They are both vitally linked.

[ 8 : 51 ] They are two sides of one coin. You cannot separate the one from the other. True saving faith is linked to repentance.

You can't believe in Jesus without turning away from your sin. Without hating sin. Without turning your back upon it and wanting to be rid of it.

We turn from our sins to God. We give up our wicked lives, our self-righteousness and our pride and all the rest of it. We turn and we grasp hold of Jesus Christ.

We lay hold of him. True saving faith then involves repentance. Turning from our sinful wicked ways.

Turning with grief and hatred. Grief because we've sinned so much and wasted our lives so much. Hatred for the devil.

[ 9 : 55 ] We're not to love the devil we're to hate him. Hate the devil and hate everything that belongs to the devil. with grief and hatred.

Fourthly, faith, true saving faith involves an understanding of Christ as saviour.

An appreciation of what Christ has done. Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners.

Faith grasps that.

Faith understands that Jesus died in our Roman place. Offered himself as a sacrifice for us. Faith understands the cross and sees the cross as vital.

It is at the very centre of faith. Jesus Christ and him crucified. Finally, faith receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation.

[ 11 : 21 ] others will trust in their good deeds, trust in the improvement that they are making in their lives, trust in the progress, the reformation, trust in their diligence, their prayers, their Bible reading, their zeal, or whatever.

A true saving faith trusts in Christ alone. Our only hope is that Jesus died for us and we cast ourselves upon him.

We receive him, we rest upon him alone as our saviour, depending upon him and taking him as he has offered to us in the gospel.

There then, we see what faith, true faith, is all about. Yes, you have your faith, but is it the right faith?

Is it saving faith? Will it deliver your soul? Will it help you in the day of trouble? Will it deliver you when it comes to death?

[12:38] Will it be with you when you pass through the Jordan? When you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, remember him of whom this chapter speaks, who will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he comes, when he appears from heaven with all his glory?

Will your faith stand you in that day? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Is it a faith that you have received from God as a gift?

Is it a faith that involves an awareness of sin and your own unworthiness that is linked to repentance? A faith that understands Christ the Savior and his work and casts yourself upon him, receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ as he is offered to you in the gospel?

If it is, if it is, friend, you've got the most precious thing of all, the pearl of great price. You're rich. You've got treasure. You're safe and secure for a time and for eternity. That's faith.

[14:11] Secondly, can faith grow? I remember as a student debating this point and arguing that faith couldn't grow.

Remember arguing from that verse, remember where the disciples come to Jesus and they say, Lord, increase our faith. faith. Jesus said to them, if you have faith even as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea and it will obey you.

I remember arguing, well, surely they are the disciples and they're coming to Jesus and they're saying, Lord, increase our faith. And Jesus says to them, it's not a matter of increasing your faith. If you have faith even as a tiny little grain of mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds you shall say to a mountain, be removed and cast into the sea and it will obey you.

What you need is to have faith. That's all that matters. Don't be concerned about increase our faith, but if you have faith even as a grain of mustard seed, that tiny little seed of faith, you'll be able to move mountains.

[15:41] You'll be powerful. There was something in that argument, but it was forgetting the verse that's before us here tonight.

Because in this verse, you see that faith does grow, ought to grow, must grow. we are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, as it is proper, because that your faith grows exceedingly.

Faith must grow. Faith is not just a one-off thing.

It's not a mere decision registered for Christ. It's not a little prayer made, and then we're converted, and that's the end of it, we can forget about faith, faith is something in the past, and then we're concerned about holiness.

That's not right. Faith is not simply a prayer made to God, an accepting of Christ, and that's it.

[17:02] faith is a life. It's something that must go on. It's an attitude of mind. It's a constant dependence upon God, with a growing realization of our own sinfulness and need, and a growing appreciation of how Christ meets our need.

While it's true on the one hand that the vital thing is that we have faith, and there's all the difference in the world between somebody who has no faith and somebody who has some faith, even if you only have a little faith like a grain of mustard seed, that faith can remove mountains of sin.

the important thing in the first place is, do you have faith? Yes, that is the vital question to begin with. Do you have any saving faith?

If you have saving faith, then you are in the class of the saved. You're a blessed person, highly privileged and very rich. But then having saving faith, you must not rest content there. must be a groin in that faith. You must go on from there and develop from there. Your faith must get richer and fuller.

[18:34] Paul prayed, 1 Thessalonians 3 verse 10, he prayed that the faith of the Thessalonians would be increased.

And now chapter 1 verse 3 of 2 Thessalonians is rejoicing that their faith has grown and grown exceedingly.

On the one hand, faith can get weaker. Faith doesn't grow automatically. In fact, faith can go the other way.

faith can get weaker and get less. If you're careless about your Christian life, if you're half-hearted as a Christian, then you can be sure that you're not making progress, but you're going backwards.

Your faith is not growing, but it's getting smaller, diminishing. if you're backsliding, hanging on to some sin, allowing sin to have dominion over you, if sin is getting the grip of your heart and life, be sure of this, your faith is diminishing.

[ 20 : 03 ] It's getting smaller, it's getting weaker. If you're allowing pride to rise up in your heart and thinking, see me, who's like me, I'm so good, I do this, I do that, and the next thing, you can be sure of this, your faith isn't growing, it's getting weaker.

There are many things that militate against faith. the devil is constantly trying to weaken it, and if we're not looking after our souls, if we're not cultivating our own hearts and lives, the garden of our soul, then be sure of this, our faith will get weaker, our assurance will get weaker, our right to call God, our Father will get weaker, our consciousness of God's presence, presence, our sense of his being with us, the blessing of God upon our lives, our faith will get weaker.

in times of persecution, times of trial, times of trouble, times of pain and sickness, two things can happen.

If we give in, and in the time of difficulty start to complain, if we break down, then your faith will get weaker.

but if you cling more tightly to Christ, your faith will get stronger. Rejoice in tribulation, for tribulation works patience, patience, experience, experience hope.

[ 21 : 58 ] Rejoice in trials, why? Because these trials, when properly used by us and blessed to us by God, will lead to the strengthening and developing of our own hope and assurance and faith.

But, if we give in, if we give up, if we collapse, then faith is battered and broken too.

No, in the times of trouble and difficulty, we must hang on to Christ. we must be like a tree, a tree that grows up in a park, where it's out in the open, it's exposed to the wind.

Wind blows at it from all angles, stronger winds, weaker winds, winds from the north, winds from the south, from the west, from the east, different winds blowing, and that tree, the more the wind blows against it, the more it puts its roots down into the rock.

The taller it grows, the more its roots are going down. It's quite different from a sheltered tree, a tree that's growing in the middle of a forest. The root structure isn't the same with such a tree.

[ 23 : 21 ] Cut down the trees that are around a tree in the forest, and the first gust of wind will blow that tree down, because it doesn't have that root structure.

Now that's the way it is with a Christian, the Christian who is trusting in Jesus, looking to Jesus, waiting on Jesus, the Christian who in the time of stress and strain is clinging to Christ, that Christian will get stronger and stronger, and in the midst of deeper difficulties and more problems, and no matter what the situation is, the trials and tribulations and persecutions, that Christian will stand, because the roots are going down into the rock, Christ, gripping hold of Christ, and not letting him go.

That's a picture that we have of faith as it develops. If we hang on to Christ, God will give us more grace, and he gives us grace to help in time of need.

That's a tremendous, tremendous thought. Grace to help in time of need. We don't get grace when we don't need it.

Sometimes when we think of persecution and Christians enduring persecution, we can feel a shiver going through ourselves.

[ 25 : 00 ] how could we possibly endure such persecution, thumb screws, or the rack, or whatever it might be, and we think to ourselves, we could never stand up.

Let us remember we don't have the grace just now to stand up to these things because we're not going through these things. But praise God, the God in whom we trust, if and when the time comes when we shall have to go through persecution, he will give us the grace to help in time of need. Faith must grow, and as faith grows, God's grace is bestowed upon us. Clinging to Christ, God strengthens us to cling more to Christ.

Christ. And as we cling to Christ, we receive from Christ the grace, the strength, the power, the perseverance that we so much need.

We don't know what we will be going through in the future. We don't know what dark days are ahead of us. But let's not worry about the dark days in front of us.

[ 26 : 14 ] Think not of tomorrow. don't be over-bothered about what's around the corner. Fight the fight of God today.

Live for God in the present. Surmount the problems that confront you now. And be sure of this, God will give you the grace tomorrow to face tomorrow's problems.

Can faith grow? Praise God, it can grow and it will grow. It must grow. I wonder is your faith growing.

Are you trusting in Christ more today? Are you more aware today of your own weakness than you were when you were first converted?

Do you appreciate your own vulnerability, ability, how easy it is for you to sin? Are you more aware of the sinfulness of your heart?

[ 27 : 21 ] Are you by grace reaching out more and more to Christ, seeking to lay hold of him, rejoicing in the sufficiency of the gospel to meet your every need, growing in an awareness of your sinfulness and awareness of the adequacy of Christ to meet your every need and to help you through your every problem?

Is the blood of Christ more and more your only hope? If it is, your faith is growing. Faith grows and as it grows, prayerfulness grows, dependence upon God in prayer, looking to God each day, every moment of each day, praying without ceasing, that is, as faith grows, our dependence upon God grows also.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly. But notice thirdly, a further evidence that we have of faith growing, and that is that love grows too, and the two things go hand in hand, as your faith grows, your love grows.

Remember what James says to us, by works is a man justified, and not by faith only. Let's not think of the Christian life as a matter of believing in Jesus and living the way you like, carrying on in your sins, and wallowing in your own filthy ways, and following your own selfish desires.

That's not the Christian life. The Christian life is salvation from sin, trusting in Jesus to be delivered from a filthy life, trusting in Jesus in order to be strengthened to love our enemies.

[ 29 : 32 ] by works a man is justified, because your works justify you in the sight of others, approve you, show you to be approved, demonstrate that you are a Christian, and that it is the true faith which you have.

Your works, your love, love for one another, and love for others, is the proof, the demonstration, the declaration of your faith, of your justification.

So the evidence then of our faith growing is in our love growing, and our love grows as we appreciate Jesus Christ.

Christ, the more you see of your own sinfulness, and the more you realize what Christ has done for you, the more you understand what it cost Christ to save you, the more you understand how unworthy you are of that salvation, the more you understand that he has saved you, the more you will love him, and the more you will, because you love him, keep his commandments, and one of his commandments is to love one another, and because you appreciate Christ, and love him, you will love everyone whom he loves, because you see what he has done for you, you cannot do enough for others.

love him, we love one another then, because Christ first loved us, appreciating Christ's love, faith sees what Christ has done, so we can't do too much for others, and our love for them.

[ 31 : 43 ] And so you see that faith grows, and as faith grows, the charity of every one of you all toward each other, abounded, that love, that self-denying, self-giving love, grows more and more, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you.

Those that hurt you, they will be hurt. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay. Don't worry about trying to hurt other people back.

You don't have to. Be at peace, be at rest. You trust in God, you are growing in faith, you are leaving your life more and more in God's hands. Don't be harboring hard thoughts in your heart. Don't be bitter towards others. Leave others in God's hands. He'll deal with them. You just leave your life in God's hands. Grow in faith, grow in dependence of God.

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay. Growing in love one toward another, so that we ourselves glory in you and the churches for your patience and faith and all your persecutions and tribulations which you endure.

[ 33 : 24 ] You are the apple of God's eye. Believe that. Leave yourself at his hands. Rest in the Lord and leave him to fight your cause for you.

Further, remember that God positively gives you rest. To you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.

Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He gives us rest. He gives us rest in the next life.

There he may not therefore a rest unto the people of God. There's a great rest, a great peace, a great glory in front of us. But praise God, it's not just in front of us, it's something that will come to us here too, so that we have a peaceful life even in the midst of our troubles, as we rest in the Lord, as we experience a heaven of grace here below, just as we'll experience a heaven of glory in the next life.

A heaven of grace, a heaven in a state of grace, as we experience that rest and peace of committing our lives to Christ, laying them upon him, rejoicing in his care for us, knowing that the heavenly Father looks after us, we are secure in him.

[ 35 : 09 ] so what about you then? Are you growing in love? Do you love Christians more today than you did in the past? Growing in love one for another, growing in the peace of God, filling your heart, rejoicing in the care that God has over you, growing in faith and growing in love?

Not stagnant, not backsliding, but going on. We must go on. We are not of them that turn back unto perdition, to lostness.

We are of them that go on to the saving of the soul. Don't be hanging back, don't be turning back, don't be going to the old ways, don't be letting the old things grip you, but reach forward, growing in love for God, love for one another, growing in faith and dependence, and more and more realizing your own sinfulness, more and more appreciating Christ the Savior, reaching forward unto him, running the race with patience, laying hold of eternal life.

May that be true of us all. Let us pray. Gracious and ever-blessed God, we pray that thou would enable us to press on into the kingdom, not to hang back, to reach forward, to run the race, to strive to enter in at the straight gate, to go on seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And so we pray that our faith would grow exceedingly, that our love would increase abundantly, our love for one another, that we would be united, bound together in love, that we would not be selfish, making demands on others, but rather making demands upon ourselves, forgiving others, and seeing the best in them.

[ 37 : 33 ] Do thou bless us and make us a blessing. For Jesus' sake, Amen.