

# **AFFLICTIONS ...**

## **THE DESTINY OF THE FAITHFUL**

*Afflictions, then glory ...*



- An affliction is a faith test ... a trial of life that God sets before us which increases the pressure of living in a sin ravaged world and brings us to life transforming moments of decision. Will we trust God in the affliction and grow in faith ... or will we shrink back in distrust and unbelief?

**PART ONE: THE BACKDROP —THE BASIS FOR PAUL's CONCERN FOR THE THESSALONIANS ...**

**1. To understand Paul's concern for the Thessalonians we need a full view of the battlefield.**

- (1 Thessalonians 2:2–4 ESV) But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. 3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

A. The battlefield upon which Paul preached the gospel of God was vicious and unrelenting in opposition.

B. The battlefield was/is everywhere the gospel of God is preached to please God and not humans.

- (Galatians 1:11 ESV) For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

**2. The whole world is caught up in the battle between God and Satan, good and evil.**

- (Genesis 3:15 ESV) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
- (Genesis 3:17 NLT) And to the man he said ... the ground is cursed because of you.
- (Romans 8:21–22 ESV) ... that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

**3. In general the main goal of Paul's adversaries was to shut him up by whatever means possible.**

- A. Their tactics involved accusations, slander, beatings and imprisonment often forcing him to leave town.
- B. They also devoted much time and effort to undoing the truth that Paul preached to the people.

**4. Here are some examples of specific tactics they used and the effects they had on the people.**

A. The Jews incited people and stirred up persecution.

- (Acts 13:50 ESV) ... the Jews incited ... stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas.

**B. The Jews stirred up and poisoned minds.**

- (Acts 14:1–2 ESV) ... spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

C. Some persons (possibly not with evil intent) troubled believers with their words and unsettled their minds.

- (Acts 15:24 ESV) Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions.

D. The Jews were jealous and formed mobs which disturbed and unsettled people.

- (Acts 17:5, 8 ESV) But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ... And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.

E. They followed Paul—agitating, stirring up the crowds.

- (Acts 17:13 ESV) But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

F. The Jews stirred up the crowd and made accusations based on what they supposed what Paul had done.

- (Acts 21:27–29 ESV) When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

G. The Jews slandered and accused Paul based on information contrary to what actually happened.

- (Acts 24:5–6 ESV) For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him.

5. Here are some basic, biblical principles that provide a starting point for the person who is sincere about withstanding the devil's schemes.
  - A. Be aware of the ever present, concerted effort to oppose and distort the gospel by the devil and all those who have fallen prey to his schemes.
  - B. This includes, whether passively or aggressively, everyone who is not walking by the Spirit of God—in other words the vast majority of people on the planet.
  - C. Have truth as a priority and be intent on establishing the facts—reject “supposed” events.
  - D. Always be ready to examine our own motives in regard to who and what we listen to knowing our human tendency is to listen to things that suit our cause and desires.
  - E. Discipline ourselves with Scripture to acknowledge our human frailties in regard to our heart.
    - (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV) **The heart is deceitful above all things**, and desperately sick; **who can understand it?**
  - F. Since the heart is the center of our emotions, our intellect and our will, we must acknowledge the supernatural extent of the battle within each of us.
  - G. Always be wary of following the crowd.

**PART TWO: THE NECESSARY PERSPECTIVE —PAUL GIVES URGENT INSTRUCTIONS TO THE THESSALONIANS REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP OF AFFLICTIONS TO THEIR FAITH ...**

1. The Lord sets afflictions before us to strengthen our resolve and to increase our ability to believe him, 3:1-2.
  - (1 Thessalonians 3:1–2 ESV) Therefore **when we could bear it no longer**, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, **to establish and exhort you in your faith.**
- A. Paul was passionate that the Thessalonians needed his immediate attention in their faith battle.
  - i. His concern was that they would be shaken by the afflictions they were facing.
  - ii. So he and the others sent Timothy to establish and exhort them in the faith.
  - iii. This was a personal sacrifice for Paul.
- B. The importance of the relationship between afflictions and faith is a common theme in Scripture.
  - i. Facing trials of various kinds should bring us joy knowing that our faith is being strengthened.

- (James 1:2–3 ESV) **Count it all joy**, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 **for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.**
- ii. We should rejoice that these temporary events provide us with an eternal opportunity.
  - (1 Peter 1:6–7 ESV) **In this you rejoice**, though now for a little while, if necessary, **you have been grieved by various trials**, 7 **so that** the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—**may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**
- iii. Intense trials should not surprise us.
  - (1 Peter 4:12 ESV) **Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you**, as though something strange were happening to you.
- C. An affliction is a trial of life which increases the pressure of living in a sin ravaged world and that brings us to a moment of decision.
 

Afflictions ... θλῖψις [thlipsis] – a pressing, pressing together, pressure; metaphorically, oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress; a state of distress; an oppressive state of physical, mental, social, or economic adversity.
- D. Our decision is this ... will we believe and/or continue to believe God and trust him with the results.
- E. We grow in our trust and our knowledge of God when we believe his words and live accordingly during times of affliction.
- F. Trusting God in this way we receive a supernatural knowledge of life from the Holy Spirit that is not based on the circumstances and events of our lives but on God's word.
- G. Or we choose to not trust God during these times and our interpretation of the world remains imprisoned within a mere human perspective of life.

2. It is essential in establishing our faith that we know that we are destined for afflictions, 3:3-5.
  - (1 Thessalonians 3:3–5 ESV) ... that no one be moved by these afflictions. **For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.** 4 For when we were with you, **we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction**, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, **I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you** and our labor would be in vain.

A. To not be shaken by our afflictions we need to know that setting afflictions before us is the decision of our sovereign Lord for our eternal good.

Destined ... κεῖμαι [keimai] – of things put or set in place; to be set in place by God, i.e. destined, appointed; to be determined (set); to be established, set, or appointed conclusively and authoritatively.

B. Knowing that God uses afflictions as part of his eternal plan to bring us to glory is crucial to a proper perspective of the Christian life.

C. We must consider that not choosing to believe God in our afflictions after repeated instruction and warning is "unfaith" ... and to not believe God is sin.

D. Our destiny is twofold: Afflictions, then glory.

#### FOUR EXAMPLES ...

- i. Our destiny of suffering is temporary, universal to the family of God and ultimately ends with our being called to God's eternal glory in Christ.
  - (1 Peter 5:8–10 ESV) Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.
- ii. Our destiny is that we will go through many tribulations before we ultimately and finally enter the kingdom of God.
  - (Acts 14:22 ESV) ... strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.
- iii. Our destiny is affirmed by the Holy Spirit as he himself gives witness to our spirit that we must suffer with Jesus Christ in order that we will be glorified with him.
  - (Romans 8:16–17 ESV) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.



iv. Our destiny of afflictions is a gift of God's grace by which we have been blessed with the privilege to believe in Christ and to suffer for his sake.

- (Philippians 1:29 ESV) For it has been granted [charizomai—grace gift] to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

#### CONCLUSION: PAUL'S CONCERN WAS THEIR FAITH ... THAT THEY WOULD KEEP BELIEVING AND KEEP TRUSTING GOD ...

- (1 Thessalonians 3:5b ESV) I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

#### I. God says our affliction is our destiny and our preparation for glory.

- (2 Corinthians 4:17–18 ESV) For this light momentary affliction [thlipsis] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

#### II. The temptation was that they would no longer believe God and fall just as Eve did in the garden.

#### III. Our powerful defense is to take up the shield of faith—always in all circumstances.

- (Ephesians 6:16–17 ESV) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

#### IV. The faithful keep receiving the word of God as the word of God and not as the word of humans.

Belief is faith. We keep believing God and never turn back from the battle. Those who continue to believe follow Jesus directly into the battle which means walking straight into the fiery darts of the accuser. But we do not shrink back ...

- We raise the shield of faith to extinguish the lies and accusations of the evil one.
- We wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to expose the lies and the liars.