

MAKE YOUR LOVE INCREASE AND OVERFLOW

1 Thessalonian 2:17-3:13

Key Verse: 3:12

“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as our does for you.”

Today’s passage is mainly Apostle Paul’s concern, thanks and prayers for Thessalonian Christians who were going through times of trials and persecutions. Paul had three prayer topics; 1) to see them face to face, 2) for their love to increase and overflow, and 3) for their hearts to be strengthened. May God grant each one of us to receive the word of God through today’s passage. Amen.

I. Settle In These Trials (2:17-3:5)

Look at verse 2:17, “But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you.” Due to persecutions, Christians in Thessalonica had to send Paul, Silas and Timothy away to Berea. They felt that they were being orphaned, which revealed their loneliness during the time of God’s work. They had to move one place to another constantly like Missionary Isaac and Mary Baek’s family. How hard it could have been for them to endure?

Even though they were separated, they were in their thought like a lover. Even though their bodies were separated, they were together in their prayer and concern. They wanted to see the Thessalonians like parents who wanted to see their children. They wanted to see them in order to provide anything lacking in their faith. The new believers needed to stand firm going through persecutions. They were being tempted from the influence of the world. Paul wanted to encourage them to love each other in this time of trials, and strengthen them to live moral and blameless lives.

They tried to come, especially Paul tried again and again, but could not because Satan blocked their way. We do not know how Satan blocked his way, but we know for sure that there was hindrance for Paul to go to Thessalonica. According to Acts 17 he was being chased by the Jews from Thessalonica who came to persecute Paul in Berea. Maybe Thessalonian Jews lied to people in Berea so that they would not sell Paul a horse riding ticket to Thessalonica. Paul was afraid that the Christians in Thessalonica were being persecuted and lost. He loved them so much because they were his hope, joy and crown in the presence of the coming Jesus.

What is worse, Paul alone had to go to Athens due to persecution in Berea by the Thessalonian Jews instead of going to see Christians in Thessalonica. But Paul had to do something. **Look at 3:1-2, “So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, he is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith.”** Paul tried again and again but could not wait any longer. So he decided to send Timothy to them in order to strengthen and encourage them in their faith. Why? Or how could Timothy strengthen and encourage them in their faith? First, Timothy encouraged them to settle down in spite of these trials. **Look at verses 3-4, “So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know**

quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you know.” They need to be strengthened to settle during these trials. Paul did not limit his topic to persecutions, but said trials because they were going through many trials of life. When people go through trials, our hearts go through turmoil like a small boat in a storm, sailing up and down, not knowing what future will hold. At that time, we often act and react unreasonably due to uncertainty. We easily become anxious and cannot settle down. How can we settle down during these trials? We need to know that we are destined for such trials whether we like it or not. Sometimes, it seems too much to take. But if we want to live a life without trials, we have to live out of this world. Paul was teaching what should be our attitude toward trials in life. Here is a good example. Once the disciples were in the storm, and Jesus was coming to save them. But when they saw Jesus walking on the water, they thought that he was a ghost and screamed. Only when they listened to the voice of Jesus, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid,”** their eyes were opened to see Jesus not as a ghost. Then, they could let Jesus come into their boat. As soon as they let Jesus come in, the storm calmed down and the boat reached the shore. This teaches us how to find peace at the time of trials. At the time of trials, we can settle down when we must listen to the voice of Jesus and let him come into our hearts and lives.

Secondly, Timothy strengthened them to overcome temptations. While Paul was with them, he told them that they would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, which means that they are being persecuted. Paul prepared the Thessalonians for the time of persecution. The problem is that the persecution also comes with temptations. **Look at verse 5, “For this reason, when I could not stand it no longer, I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.”** There were temptations inside and out. They could have been tempted by the Thessalonian culture. The Thessalonians worshiped idols and practiced sexual immorality, which influenced Christians. Some of them had a wrong concept of the gospel, that they could be saved even if they lived an immoral life. In 2 Thessalonians, the tempter tried to plant the wrong concept of second coming, saying that Jesus already came on earth with signs and wonders. Paul was very anxious to find out how they were doing, just like a mother worrying about her own children who are living in a dangerous place. So he sent Timothy to strengthen their faith. He was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted them and that their labors might have been in vain.

Paul’s concern for them Thessalonian Christians can be our concern in this generation. There are so many temptations Christians have to face. Now, many churches are being broken on the issue of homosexual lifestyle and people. Many young people think that living together is not that serious a sin compared to homosexual life. Yes, sin is sin, but it doesn’t mean that we hate sinners but love them as Jesus loved sinners. It does not mean that we condone their lifestyle as the norm. We hate sin but love sinners to come to Christ. In this internet and SNS (Social Network System) age, we have a quite unique temptation, being lost in fantasy world. Many young people are drawing away from reality. They do not know how to have relationship with others. Shepherd Matthew said that it is because they are becoming more and more self-centered. They do not know how to consider others but their own world and enjoyment. Even though they accept Jesus Christ as their own savior, they are constantly think of themselves only, not others,

which is human sinful nature. Then, we are tempted to give up on such people. May God strengthen each one of us to continue to teach the Biblical values so that they may overcome temptations and be sacrificial servants of Jesus, shining the light of Jesus in this generation which is getting darker. Amen.

II. Make Your Love Increase and Overflow (3:6-13)

What was Timothy's report about their faith? **Look at verses 6, "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you."** Timothy brought good news about their faith and love. What kind of faith and love? They kept their faith during the time of trials and persecutions. They stood firm on the gospel of Jesus. They did not follow the people of the world. They hated sin but loved sinners with the love of Christ. They longed to see Paul and Silas, their shepherds. Timothy told them that they always had pleasant memories of Paul and Silas and longed to see them, their shepherds. How happy for Paul and Silas to hear that! It was refreshing for them while they were also lonely in the midst of trials and persecutions. Their life of faith truly encouraged them, so much so that they could really live, living in peace and joy. Paul and Silas were thankful to God for their faith, love and fellowship. It is like listening to wonderful testimonies; how they overcame and stood firm in Christ. When we hear about the lives of faith of our missionaries and shepherds, how they overcame very difficult situations by faith and win the victory for God, we are greatly encouraged.

One's life of faith encourages not only people but also Jesus. There was one centurion who believed in the power of Jesus' word in Luke 7. When he came to ask Jesus to heal one of his servants, Jesus was willing to go his house. But he said, **"Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'go' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he come. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."** Simply speaking, Jesus did not have to come but just speak and the centurion believed his servant would be healed. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed by his great faith in the power of Jesus' words. Thank God for giving us such a great number of men and women of faith, and some of them are listed in Hebrews 11. What kind of faith do you need that pleases God in your situation now? May God help us to have faith that pleases God and encourages others. Amen!

Paul and Silas thanked God and prayed for the Christians in Thessalonica. What were their prayer topics for the Thessalonian Christians? First, they prayed for the way to come to the Thessalonians. **Look at verse 11, "Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way to come to you."** Even though he heard the good news about their faith, he still longed to see them face to face and have fellowship with them in person. Maybe I can understand their desire to see them a little bit through my recent trip to Korea. When I went to Korea and had fellowship with the shepherds who longed to see me, it was the time of pouring out our hearts and lives, praying with joy and tears, encouraging and being encouraged by each other.

Secondly, they prayed to increase and overflow their love for each other and for everyone else. Look at verse 12, **“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.”** How can we increase our love for each other? This means that our love has limitation by nature. We love whom we like or people who are nice to us or when they behave. But Jesus said, **“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”** (Matthew 5:46-47) Therefore, our love must be grow. How? These days I have felt I am getting weaker, so I checked the BlueCross BlueShield website to find out how I can get stronger. The healthcare specialist recommended me, saying, **“In order our muscles to get stronger, we must do exercise until we cannot do it anymore even though it is painful.”** Wow! Is it the same way our love grows and get stronger? We must struggle to love, denying our natural feeling and overcoming our limits. Maybe we feel painful because it is the time our love should be increasing beyond our limits. Love covers a multitude of sins. At the time of trials, it is easy for anyone to point fingers toward each other. The disciples were constantly arguing as well. Therefore, Jesus gave the new command, **“Love each other as I have loved you,”** over and over again. Likewise, Paul and Silas prayed for Thessalonian Christians to increase their love for each other, covering each other’s weaknesses.

Paul actually went one step further; their love may not only increased but overflowed. How can our love overflow? It reminds me of the Samaritan woman’s story in John 4. Jesus invited her, saying in verse 13-14, **“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’** When the Samaritan woman drank the water Jesus gave, her joy and love were overflowing like a spring of water. Then she did not care for herself anymore but shared the love of Christ with others. This is the reason why Paul prayed that their love may overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as they reached out to them though they were strangers. Only when we accept the spring of Jesus’ love, our love overflows like a spring, reaching out to everyone else, even to those who persecute us. I also pray that our capacity of love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. Amen!

Thirdly, they prayed to strengthen their hearts. **Look at verse 13, “May the Lord strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.”** Heart is the source of strength. Therefore, we must protect our hearts. When we lose our heart, we lose our strength. You are going to be a slave of someone or something to which you give your heart. How can we strengthen our hearts? **Luke 8:15 says, “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good hearts, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”** When we feed our hearts with God’s word, our hearts get stronger and bear much fruit inside and out. Fruits of the Spirit first and then fruits in life. We will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father at the time of the Second Coming of Jesus! May God bless us to meditate on the word of God so that our hearts may be strengthened and bear much fruit for the glory God our Father. Amen!

Through today's passage, we learned Apostle Paul's concern, thanksgiving and prayer topics for Thessalonian Christians. He sent Timothy to strengthen them to settle down at the time of trials. He thanked God for their faith and love. He longed to see them and prayed for their love to increase and overflow for each other and everyone else. We learned that we may increase our love when we go beyond our limitations even though it may be painful. When we receive the love of Christ, our love may overflow and reach out to others. Paul also prayed for their hearts to be strengthened. Through meditating on the word of God, our hearts may be strengthened and bear much fruit in 2016 for the glory of God. Amen!