

Suffering and Tribulation

Paul often writes of the suffering and tribulation Christians may experience in life. During the early days of the church such suffering and tribulation was common. Writing to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul states, "To establish you, and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1Thessalonians 3:2-3). Paul's admonition here is one that repeated often in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles (Matthew 10:22; Acts 14:22; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 3:12 are examples). Those seeking to please God have endured suffering and tribulation throughout the ages, including today.

Paul seems to focus in upon the point that as Christians, they should not be shaken. Why? Seemingly, Paul is reminding them that such suffering and tribulation is what they signed up for when they obeyed the Gospel of Christ. These in Thessalonica had received the word in much affliction (1 Thessalonians 1:6) as they turned away from serving idols to serving "the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In addition, as Paul continues, he expresses his great joy that they are "standing fast" in the faith and encourages them to "increase and abound in love" (1 Thessalonians 3:6-12).

Paul understood, as did Peter, that the devil is ever prowling like a lion to devour the Child of God (1 Peter 5:8). Paul also understood that when the Christians faith is tested by the devil, the possibility of falling away exist (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul knew that sometimes faith fails because the Christian is not rooted deeply enough into the truth (Colossians 2:7) causing the Christians faith to be overthrown (2 Timothy 2:16-18). The suffering and tribulation these Christians are going through are actually common unto all humankind (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 4:12; 1 Peter 5:9). However, the difference for these Christians was that they had become "followers of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:6), thus having the "hope that does not disappoint" (Romans 5:1-5) that unbelievers do not have.

Hope of an eternity in Heaven with God and Jesus gave the early Christians desire to continue in the faith, despite the suffering and tribulation they endured. Let us each purpose to anchor ourselves in that same hope through submissive obedience.