

WE Live, If YE Stand Fast

"The Lord make you to increase and abound in love toward one another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you"—1 Thessalonians 3:12

IN THE apostle Paul's writings to the Thessalonians, we have the expression of a mind well refined in the Truth, as his actions together with his thoughts help us to see the truth of his words when he said—

"For now WE live, if YE stand fast in the Lord."

This also makes us realize our own responsibilities in the Truth, as *it takes us beyond our own present associations into that of the whole family of God*, as we, a glorious perfect unity, are in fellowship one with another, and with God.

As we read Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, we can see that it has come to his attention that things were not just as they should be in that newly-formed young ecclesia. As much as he would like to have Timothy with him to assist in the ministry of the Word, yet Paul was willing, when he could no longer forbear, "to be left alone at Athens" that Timothy may go to Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:2)—

"To establish you, and to comfort you concerning the faith."

It appears that some there were being disturbed by the trials and responsibilities attached to a life in the Truth. So Paul tells them—

"No man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto."

They had rejoiced at first when the glorious Gospel of salvation was introduced to them, but now, as trials began to come, and the way seemed rough and weary, there was a need for Timothy among them to "establish and strengthen them," and Paul was willing for their sakes, to be left alone while they were being helped.

What an incentive to us is the attitude of this aged apostle, and his hopes were that the brothers and sisters would be established, strengthened and encouraged to continue in the Faith to which they had been called!

Do we not also have loving thoughts and care for the brothers and sisters in our day, of whom we think so highly, as we rejoice with them, as we read in the magazines of their visiting one another, by means of which association the brotherhood is established in the faith!

The care of all the ecclesias is, to a large extent, the business of us all and THE DEPTH WITH WHICH WE ARE AFFECTED BY THEIR AFFAIRS IS A GOOD MEASURE OF OUR OWN STANDING IN THE TRUTH.

It was in the exercise of love and care that Paul wrote—

"For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know."

Tribulation is a necessary part of the development of God's people and it is such as will bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in the case of those who are properly exercised by them. Did not the angel tell John, with reference to the redeemed: —

"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14).

Washing means cleansing, and cleansing can only be effected by standing fast in the Lord, that we be not moved away; for *as we avoid the offence of the cross to avert the trials, the cleansing process fails to reach us.*

We notice with what great joy Paul received the news from Timothy, when he returned from Thessalonica, that all was well there—

"Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith; for now WE live, if YE stand fast in the Lord."

Even so it was with the apostle John, as he wrote to "the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the Truth"—

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the Truth" (3 John 4).

What a joy, what a comfort, what a consolation it is to all of us to see and be associated with those who are steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord! "Forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Then the apostle goes on in v. 9—

"For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God."

The apostle could not find words to express himself on account of the good report he had received of them. But what sorrow it brings when conditions are found to be the reverse! What anxiety it has brought to the minds of those who were exercised like Paul for the Truth's welfare when it is found that the tempter or adversary has claimed its toll.

How sad it is when the purity of the Truth, which was once the first love of the brethren and sisters, is now so lightly esteemed. Where is now the enthusiasm that burned so brightly then, as Paul wrote: —

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (v. 10).

How well the apostle could supply that which was lacking in the ecclesia, we all know as we read of his great zeal for God, and his love for the brethren. We do not have the pleasure of a personal visit from one who is so able, but we can find the qualities of his character in our brothers and sisters, as we associate with them, and are strengthened by their love and faith.

They add that much needed stimulant to our faith by which our drooping spirits are cheered, as hand in hand we walk together, comforted one by the other so that we are helped along the way. What strong and inspiring words the apostle uses in the three closing verses of this chapter—

"Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

"And the Lord make you to INCREASE AND ABOUND IN LOVE ONE TOWARD ANOTHER, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

"To the end that he may establish your hearts UNBLAMABLE IN HOLINESS BEFORE GOD, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

And may that mind that Paul sought and hoped for in the Thessalonians be manifest in all of us, yes, in all our brothers and sisters everywhere! May the Lord be the incentive for us to be full and to overflow with love to each other! And let our love not stop there, but let us be zealously affected toward all our brothers and sisters throughout the world, *for Christ's sake*. For we will remember that Christ, even now, though he is personally absent from us, is yet not unmindful of the ecclesias in the

midst of whom he walks with a full knowledge of their ways and as an understanding of all their needs.

The thoughts, love and care of the apostle Paul reached out with deep-felt interest to include the entire brotherhood an understanding of all their needs.

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

That, brothers and sisters, is our hope and crown of rejoicing, the well-being of each other in the Truth. Our responsibilities and interests in the way of life are not altogether personal and individual; for we are commanded—

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"

(Phil. 2:4).

It is natural that we are drawn close together, for we all have common interests and the goal for which we are striving is the same with us all. We are also outcasts from the society and association of the world, with no continuing city here, but looking for one to come—

"That hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

How dreary and lonely the way would be were it not for the bright spots when we can gather with those we love in the Truth and renew the bonds of our unity and faith, and cheer each other up by our mutual faith and consolation!

Though we, in this present life, may be crucified with Christ, yet let us live in him so that our lives that we live in the flesh, though full of trials and great difficulties, may result in a manifestation of that faith which is pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ. Let us then be comforted by the apostle's words—

"To the end that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." —W.J.P.
