

Sustained through Encouragement

Key Verse:
*“Brethren, we were
comforted over you
in all our affliction
and distress by
your faith.”*
**—I Thessalonians
3:7**

Selected Scripture:
I Thessalonians 3

His hard experiences at Philippi, his limited success at Athens, his need for fellowship, and his problems with having enough money for his daily sustenance had added to his temporary condition.

Evidently, the Lord saw that his servant Paul needed some special encouragement at this time. He was being reminded of the words of our Lord Jesus, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) ‘Tribulation’ has the thought of serious trouble, a combination of troubles that makes the experience serious even to the point of being severe because of continued troubles. Tribulations are necessary for the perfecting of the saints of God, for their trial of faith, and for the testing and preparation of those who would be joint-heirs. Suffering in the present time for the Truth’s sake has with it the same thought as it had in Paul’s day. All who are running for the prize

PAUL WAS APPARENTLY

cast down with discouragement to a large extent from the hard experiences that he had endured over the years. His epistle to the Corinthians clearly implies his discouragement and possible sickness. He wrote, “I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” (I Cor. 2:3)

His hard experiences at Philippi,

should look for these trials as a proof that they are making progress along the racecourse. Indeed, since darkness and evil hate the light, we should always remember these words: “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth.”—I Pet. 1:7

Wherever we find one of the Lord’s followers, we have an opportunity of serving the Lord, of being channels of his mercy, and helping a person who might be downcast. All comfort, though working through God’s individual servants, or the Church at Corinth, was of God; this is God’s disposition—to comfort. We, through our love, should desire to be of comfort and consolation and help to those of like precious faith. Paul needed such experiences to bring out the best that was in him and to make his epistles all the more useful. With the Lord’s people, possibly his dealings with them at times may be with the goal of preparing them for future usefulness in his service. Paul shows how he exemplified his great love when he asks the Father to help bless and strengthen his brethren. “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, . . . even as we do toward you.”—I Thess. 3:12

Hope for future work in God’s service is what should inspire us to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) Hope and courage, inspired by God’s precious promises and strengthened by experiences, will keep us joyful while we are still going on in our Christian walk striving to resist the Adversary. We should learn to rejoice in tribulation because it is an evidence that we are being made ready for a place in his glorious heavenly temple.

We must learn to trust in God’s providence in all of our affairs, not only in favorable experiences, but also in those that are difficult for us, “in all our affliction and distress.” (I Thess. 3:7) We have the present joys and hope and faith in the things unseen. “Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous.”—Ps. 33:1 ■