

Love that Gives and Courage that Stands

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

We live in a narcissistic age. But wanting to be the centre, loving yourself above others, destroys relationships and ultimately it destroys you. In this passage Paul shows a very different way to live.

Deep Relationships

Paul now defends his absence from Thessalonica. In doing so he tells the Thessalonians just how much he loves them.

Whilst there are some places you are glad to leave, Thessalonica was not one of them for Paul. His absence from them felt to him like he had been orphaned. It hurt him, and he wanted to see them. To Paul, these Christians were like an Olympic medal: they were his pride and joy. Is that how we see our fellow Christians?

We think we will be happy if we get our own way, and are at the centre, but Paul is saying that lasting joy lies in deep, loving relationships.

A Love that Sacrifices

When you love someone, separation can make anxiety grow. Paul's concern for them finally overflows and he sends Timothy back to them. But this was costly for Paul. It left him feeling even more alone. But he would rather be abandoned than abandon them. He loved them more than he loved himself. That is what true love does. It's prepared to suffer loss for the sake of the one you love.

But to live like that is so counter-cultural, you will face opposition.

A Threatened Faith

Paul is concerned that they will be unsettled by their afflictions. They were facing trouble for their refusal to worship the gods of their age. Paul says this is their (and our) destiny. Sacrificial love challenges the 'I must be at the centre' mentality of our culture. When it does, it will meet opposition. That opposition can make us wobble.

But as well as outside pressure, opposition and difficulties can also lead to inner temptations: of self-pity and doubt. As a result we can become self-absorbed. And faith, and relationships, are threatened.

So where can you find the power to love sacrificially, and the courage to stand strong against the trouble that comes your way when you do?

The One Who Works in You

Paul says Timothy is God's coworker in the gospel. This means God works through the gospel – what Jesus has done for us – to give us the desire and the ability to love sacrificially and to stand strong. When we know that we have been loved sacrificially by Jesus, we will love sacrificially. When we know the outcome is sure, we will find the courage to stand strong. We won't be moved by difficulties, because we know our destiny is in God's hands. And knowing that Jesus is coming back as king will keep us living with eternity in sight.