

Stand Firm or Walk?**1 Thessalonians 3:1—13**

1 Thessalonians 3 opens with Paul very concerned for the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians. He had been banished from Thessalonica and Berea and had worked his way to Athens then to Corinth. He was traveling with some of the believers but left Timothy and Silas in the area of Berea. Once he arrived in Athens he sent word for Timothy and Silas to join him (Acts 17:15). It appears that they met Paul in Athens then Paul sent Timothy (perhaps with Silas) back to the Thessalonians to check to see if they were continuing to grow in the faith. He then went down to Corinth where Timothy and Silas met him from their trip to Thessalonica (Acts 18:1—5). Paul was greatly encouraged and comforted to hear the Thessalonians were growing in faith and that they desired to see Paul as much as he wanted to see them.

Paul uses some interesting metaphors to describe our Christian life. On one hand we are told to walk in a worthy manner (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12), walk according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8) walk according to Paul's pattern (Philippians 3:17) and walk in Christ (Colossians 2:6).

On the other hand, Paul tells us to stand firm. We are to stand firm in the faith (1 Corinthians 16:13), Stand firm against Satan (Ephesians 6:11). Since it's impossible to walk while standing firm, Paul must have two different things in mind. I believe these concepts highlight the difference between our position in Christ and our practice.

Standing firm (verse 8)

Paul commends them for standing firm in the faith. Standing firm in their faith means they are not going to be pushed away from what they believe. The Thessalonians were suffering at the hands of the unbelieving Jews, the same people who pushed Paul out of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. This persecution could have pushed these young believers to doubt what they were told by Paul and cause them to wonder if it was worth pursuing their new Christian life. It certainly would be easier for them to go back to their idols. This does not mean these young believers would have lost their salvation, it would only mean they were not able to stand firmly in the doctrine taught to them by Paul, Silas and Timothy. Their faith was so young that they could easily have doubted that the indwelling Holy Spirit had indeed changed them. However, this was not the case for they embraced what Paul taught them and stood firm in their newfound faith in Jesus Christ. They were able to stand firm because they accepted Paul's words as the very words of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

They were able to stand firm, because they actively embraced Paul's teaching. This principle is brought out in Galatians 5:1 where the Galatians were being pulled back under the Law. Paul admonishes them to follow his teaching that they are free from the Law and pleads with them to stand firm in his teaching.

We too are to stand firm in our faith. When we understand our position in Christ then we will be able to stand firm in the faith. Colossians 2:2 connects full assurance with understanding, specifically of the Mystery of God as revealed through Paul. If we are fed the wrong doctrine then it will be very hard to stand firm in our faith. Those who take Israel's doctrine for themselves will often be led to believe they can lose salvation. Those grounded in Pauline doctrine will have the assurance that they can stand firm in their faith because the Holy Spirit seals them. Standing firm requires proper teaching of the 13 books written by the Apostle Paul. The rest of the Bible is necessary for our understanding (Romans 15:4) but the 13 books of Paul are absolutely necessary for our spiritual growth.

Established

Another closely related word used in Scripture to denote the idea of standing firm is the word establish. This word means to set solid, make firm or set fast. Concrete starts out to be quite fluid but quickly firms up to become an immovable mass. This is how our faith should work. Once we understand our position in Christ our faith in Him should solidify making us immovable and unshakable in what we believe.

Standing firm in the faith is critical for a believer to be able to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. If a believer is not able to stand firm then he or she will never be able to grow spiritually. We are established or set firm by studying Scripture, specifically Paul's writings (Romans 16:25). Our being set firm is not our own work but is accomplished in us by God through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21—22). The same Holy Spirit who revealed Paul's Mystery doctrine to be from God (Ephesians 3:5) also works in our lives to reveal His truths. As we read and study Scripture the Holy Spirit works upon us revealing the truth of Paul's doctrine and the power contained in it to change our minds from a worldly view to a godly view. When we view all things from a godly point of view we will naturally be able to stand firm without wavering in our faith.

Walking

When Paul speaks of walking he is usually speaking in terms of fellowship. When we are walking with the Lord we have fellowship with Him. A proper walk is only possible when we submit our life to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to be in control. Just as Jesus humbled Himself to the Father, our goal is be Christ-like by humbling ourselves to allow the Lord free reign in our lives. While standing firm seems to be speaking of being strong in the faith by understanding our position in Christ, our walk seems to be related to our daily focus on becoming sanctified. This sanctification, or being set apart, speaks of becoming Christ-like. Even though all believers are completely sanctified by their position in Christ, we know by experience we have a long way to go to be sanctified. Experiential or practical sanctification should be the life-long goal of a believer. This is about a believer striving to perfect his or her walk with Christ by considering the old nature dead, renewing the mind and then putting on the new nature (Ephesians 4:22—24). To accomplish this we need to treat the old nature as being dead, not trying to make it presentable to Christ. There is nothing in the old nature that can please God (Romans 7:18).

The key to living a life pleasing to God is, I believe, learning to renew the mind. There is nothing inherently evil about the body of flesh. It does whatever the mind tells it to do. If the old nature is in control then the body will do evil. If the new nature is in control, the body will please God. The body is merely an indicator of which nature is in control. (Note, however, that the body can do "good" things by man's standard yet be displeasing to God because the "good" act is not being done by the new nature, in the power of the Holy Spirit). A renewed mind is one that is feeding on things of the Lord. Instead of conforming to the world we need to be transformed and this is accomplished by allowing God to transform our mind. Before we are saved, our mind has been already formed to this world. Once we have believed, Christ can, with our permission, transform the mind molding it to conform to His will.

Be strong in the Lord

There are times in every believer's life when Satan's attacks will shake our faith. Instead of living the victorious Christian life we will be living in defeat. Instead of living above this sin-filled world we will be pulled into it. Our walk will become a limp, our prayers will seem to go nowhere and our desire to grow in the Lord will be almost non-existent. Paul anticipated this by giving us the tools we need to go against Satan's attacks. It is Satan's desire for the believer to become ineffective, to live his or her life pleasing self instead of God. We can see Paul's struggle with self (the old nature) in Romans 7.

Our defense is found in Ephesians 6 and is called the armour of God. This armament is available to every believer and is effective because the power of God is contained in it. When we put on the full armor of God we are able to stand firm in our faith and when we are standing firm we will be able to walk in a worthy manner.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com