THE NECESSITY OF GROWING FAITH

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A SERMON
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"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren,
as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly,
and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."
2 Thessalonians 1:3

LAST Lord's day I tried to say cheering and encouraging words to "Little-faith." I trust that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, did thereby strengthen some to whom the Savior said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

But none of us would desire to remain among the Little-faiths, we long to press forward in our march to the better land. If we have just started in the heavenly race, it is well. There are grounds of comfort about the first steps in the right way. But we are not going to stop at the starting-point, our desire is towards the winning-post and the crown.

My prayer at the commencement of this discourse is, that we may each of us rise out of our little faith into the loftier region of assurance, so that those who love us best may be able to say, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly."

The church of Jesus Christ at Thessalonica did not commence under very propitious circumstances. Remember that oft-quoted text about the Bereans, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so." That record does not relate to the converts in Thessalonica, but to those Jews who heard Paul preach in the synagogue, and refused to test his teaching by a reference to the Old Testament.

They were not a noble sort of people, and yet from among them there were taken by almighty grace a certain company who were led to believe in the true Messiah. Thus they became nobler than even the Bereans, for we do not hear of a church in Berea, neither was an epistle written to the Bereans. Thessalonica received two epistles, bright with hearty commendations. Paul praised the Philippians, but the Thessalonians he praised yet more, thanking God at every remembrance of them, and glorying in them among the churches of God for their patience and faith.

I shall ask you, with your Bibles open, to see whether we cannot account in some measure for this remarkable condition of things. The verse before us is full of thanksgiving to God for the growth of the Thessalonians in faith and in love. And to my mind it sounds like an echo of the first epistle to the Thessalonians.

The first epistle is the key and the cause of the second. Very often a man's success in this place, or in that, will tally with his own condition of heart in relation to that place. As we sow we reap. The grace of God enabled Paul to sow toward the Thessalonians with great hopefulness, and trust, and prayerfulness, and consequently he reaped plentifully.

Observe how (1Th 1:2-3) Paul began by distinctly recognizing the existence of faith and love in that church. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."

Recognize the root, and then look for the flower. See that faith is in the soul, smile upon it and foster it, and then you may expect that the faith will steadily increase.

In our text Paul mentions faith as growing, and love as abounding, while in the next verse he mentions patience, which is the outgrowth of hope—"the patience of hope." He noticed in the Thessalonians the birth of those three divine sisters—faith, hope, and charity. That which he recognized with pleasure he afterwards saw growing exceedingly. Those who cherish the seed shall rejoice in the plant.

Observe in the children under your care the first blossoms of any good thing, and you shall observe its increase. Despise not the day of small things. When you have learned to recognize faith in its buds, you shall soon see faith in its flowers, and faith in its fruits. Do not overlook feeble grace, or criticize it because it is as yet imperfect, but mark its beginnings with thankfulness, and you shall behold its advance with delight.

In addition to recognizing the beginnings of faith, Paul labored hard to promote it. Look in the second chapter, and read verses 7, 8, 11, 12—"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory."

He threw his whole strength into the work of building that church, toiling night and day for it, and consequently he obtained his desire. For still it is true in the husbandry of God, that those who sow, and steep their seed in the tears of earnestness, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

Paul had accompanied his public labors with his private prayers. See how 1 Thessalonians 3:12 tallies with our text—"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you." This was his prayer, and he received exactly what he prayed for.

He saw abounding love in each one towards every other. The Lord seemed to have noted the wording of Paul's prayer, and to have answered him according to the letter of his request. If we open our mouth wide, the Lord will fill it. Brethren, what we comfortably recognize in its gracious beginnings, what we labor to increase, and what we earnestly guard with prayer, shall in due time be granted to us!

More than this, Paul had gone on to exhort them to abound in love and faith. Look at chapter four, verse nine, "As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that you increase more and more."

Paul did not only quietly pray for the church, but he added his earnest admonitions. He bids them increase more and more, and in response they do increase, so that he says, "Your faith groweth exceedingly." When a man says "more and more," it is only another way of saying "exceedingly," is it not so?

There was a big heart in Paul towards the Thessalonians. He wanted them to grow in faith and love "more," and then to take another step, and add another "more" to it. The exhortation being given out of a full heart, behold, God has fulfilled it to His servant, and the people have willingly followed up the apostolic precept.

But Paul had added faith to his prayers and his exhortations. Look at chapter five, verses twenty-three through twenty-four, and see if it is not so. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." When we are sure that God will do it, it will surely be done.

We miss many a blessing because we ask without faith. The apostle believed that he had the petition which he had sought of the Lord, and he received according to his faith. He who can firmly believe shall

ere long fervently pour out thanksgiving. The church at Thessalonica, the child of Paul's prayers, the child of his labors, and at last the child of his faith, obtained a remarkable degree of faith, and a singular warmth of love.

The Lord give to us who are workers the mind and spirit of Paul, and lead us to follow him in our conduct to others, and then I do not doubt that our good wishes shall be realized. If we are right ourselves, we shall see prosperity in the churches, or classes, or families whose good we seek. And as we feel bound to pray about them, we shall also feel bound to thank God concerning them.

Before I plunge into the sermon, I should like to pause, and ask whether we as Christian men and women are such that Paul could say of us, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."

What think you? Could your pastor bless God for you? Could your nearest and dearest Christian friend feel that he was bound to thank God always for you? If not, why not? Oh that we may rise into such a happy state that we shall be the cause of gratitude in others! It ought to be so—we ought to glorify God, causing men to see our good works, and praise our Father in heaven.

One more question: Do you think we are in such a condition that it would be safe for anybody to praise us? Would it be safe to ourselves for us to be thus commended, and made subjects of thankfulness? It takes a great deal of grace to be able to bear praise. Censure seldom does us much hurt. A man struggles up against slander, and the discouragement which comes of it may not be an unmixed evil.

But praise soon suggests pride, and is therefore not an unmixed good. "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." Would it be safe if Paul were here to say good things about you as he did about the Thessalonians? Did it not prove that the brethren there were sober, well-established believers?

Once more, do you ever feel it in your heart to talk like this about your fellow Christians? Paul himself was in a fine condition when he could thus extol his brethren. Few men are ready with hearty commendations of others. We are greedy in receiving praise, and niggardly in dispensing it. We seldom speak too kindly of one another.

Now and then you hear a person say, "There is no such thing as love in the church at all." I know that gentleman very well, and I never saw any excess of love in *him*. I heard one say, "Brotherly love is all a mockery. There is no reality in Christian charity," and truly he measured his own corn very accurately.

Most men would see others better if their own eyes were clearer. When a man honestly feels that his fellow Christians are for the most part much better than himself, and that he would willingly sit at the feet of many of them, then he is himself in a healthy state. I admire the grace of God in many around me. I see their imperfections as though I did not see them. I am not looking for the thorns, but for the roses, and I see so many of them that my heart is glad, and in spirit I bless the name of the Lord.

The man who can commend the work of the Lord in others without saying a word about himself, has, by that fact, given himself a good character. His eyes must have been washed in the fountains of love. They must have been cleansed from the dust of pride, envy, and self, or he would not have so seen or so spoken.

I love the text because it is an instance of a man of great grace, of a man under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, who yet delighted to speak enthusiastically of a church which certainly was far from perfect. I delight in that eye which can be a little blind to faults while it exercises a clear vision in seeing all that is good and praiseworthy towards God.

So, then, we come to our text, and the subject runs thus, for us to grow in faith is *a subject for devout thanksgiving.* And in the second place, it is *an object for diligent endeavor*. Thirdly, if we greatly grow in faith it will be *the source of other growths*, for as faith increases, love, patience, and every other virtue, will flourish.

I. For us to grow and increase in faith is A SUBJECT FOR DEVOUT THANKSGIVING.

Paul gives a commendation of the Thessalonian church which is exceedingly warm and hearty. One critic says the words may be regarded as somewhat extravagant, after the mode of the apostle when he wishes to be emphatic. He writes fervidly, "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." It is an intense and unreserved commendation.

As I have already said, this church was not absolutely perfect, for because of the love of every one towards another, and their great kindness towards the poor, certain unworthy persons encroached upon their liberality. To use a very rough word, *cadgers* were multiplied among them, as they always are where generosity abounds. Shame that it should be so.

Read chapter three, verse eleven, "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." There had been also among them here and there a person of loose life and of sharp business dealings, and to such Paul spoke in the first epistle. But these flies in the pot of ointment did not destroy its sweetness. They were so few comparatively that Paul speaks of the whole body with approbation. When our faith shall grow and our love abound, it may be proper for a pastor to speak with unrestricted admiration of what the Lord has done.

The blessing of increased faith is of unspeakable value, and therefore praise should be largely rendered for it. Little faith will save, but strong faith is that which builds up the church, which overcomes the world, which wins sinners, and which glorifies God. Little-faith is slow and feeble, and to suit his pace the whole flock travel softly. Little-faith is a wounded soldier, and has to be carried in an ambulance by the armies of the Lord.

But faith which grows exceedingly, lifts the banner aloft, leads the van, meets hand to hand the foes of our Prince, and puts them to the rout. If we were invoking blessings upon a church we could scarcely ask for a larger boon than that all the brethren might be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Strong-faith ventures into large endeavors for Christ, and hence missions are projected.

Strong-faith carries out the projects of holy zeal, and hence daring ideals are turned into facts. Strong-faith is a shield against the darts of error, and hence she is the object of the contempt and hatred of heresy. Strong-faith builds the walls of Zion, and casts down the walls of Jericho. Strong-faith smites the Philistines hip and thigh, and makes Israel to dwell in peace.

Oh that the night of Little-faith were over, and that the day of glorious faith would come! Soon our young men would see visions, and our old men dream dreams, if faith were more among us. When the Son of man comes shall He find faith in the earth? At the revival of faith we shall see another Pentecost, with its rushing mighty wind, and its tongues of flame.

But during our lack of faith we still abide in weakness, and the enemy will exact upon us. O God, we beseech You, make Your face to shine upon us, cause our faith to grow exceedingly, and our love to abound yet more and more. Then shall there be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

Paul thus fervently gave thanks to God because the blessing came to the church at a remarkably seasonable time. The people of Thessalonica had risen against the church and persecuted it. Thus, without were fightings, but within there were no fears, for the brethren were firm in faith and fervent in love. The church was subject to constant tribulation, but its faith grew exceedingly. Has it not often been so with the Lord's people?

Times of cloud and rain have been growing times. Pharaoh dealt harshly with Israel, but the more he oppressed them, the more they multiplied. The more the church of God is down-trodden, the more it rises into power and influence. The bush burns and is not consumed. Nay, rather, it flourishes in the flame.

I say not that this increase of faith is the immediate effect of persecution, but it is singularly the attendant put upon it. God knew that when His poor servants were haled to prison, when they were brought before rulers and kings for His name's sake, and when they were spoiled of their goods, they wanted increased strength, and therefore He gave it to them by growth in faith.

As the persecution rose upon them like a deluge, their confidence in God rose above it, like Noah's ark, which rose the higher the deeper the waters became. They stood fast in the day of trial, and became an example to all other churches, whether persecuted or not, and this because their faith grew exceedingly.

Beloved, I pray for each member of this church that your confidence in God may rise from ebb to flood. We need it much just now. This is a time of depression in trade, when many are suffering want, and almost all find their means decreased. We need to be rich in faith, for we are growing poor in pocket.

Many children of God cannot find employment wherewith to earn their bread. This is, moreover, a time of abounding vice. Perhaps never in our memories were any of us so shocked as we have been of late by the discoveries of unspeakable abominations. We need that our faith should grow exceedingly, for sin runs down our streets in torrents.

It is also a period of grievous departure from the faith once delivered to the saints. Looking back to our younger days, we are amazed at the progress of error. We mourned in those days that men trifled with the doctrines of the Gospel, but what shall we now say, when men deride those doctrines, and mock at them as antiquated fables? The foundations of the earth are removed, and only here and there will you find a man who bears up the pillars thereof. Therefore we need that our faith should be exceeding steadfast.

I charge you, brethren, to be rooted and grounded in faith, seeing the times are evil! I cannot speak emphatically enough upon the abounding dangers of the times. They demand of us that we be not of doubtful mind, but that we take firm hold of infallible truth, and endure as seeing Him who is invisible. He that cannot say, "I believe, and am sure," is one born out of due time.

The apostle's commendation was meet and fit, since, if there be any growth in faith, it is the work of God's Spirit. Faith is the gift of God in its beginnings, and it is equally the gift of God in its increase. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, God gave it you. And if you have faith as a spreading tree, God has given the increase.

The infancy of faith is of God, and so is its perfect manhood. In the natural world we ought as much to admire God's hand in growth as in creation, for indeed, the out bursting of spring, the advance of summer, and the maturity of autumn, are all a sort of creation, seen in detail. Even thus the progress of faith reveals the same power as the commencement of faith.

If you do not look to God for more faith, you will never have more faith. Great faith in its strong broad current flows as much from the fountainhead of grace as in its first trickling streamlet of hope in Christ. Let God have all the glory of faith from its Alpha to its Omega. If you be a strong man in Christ Jesus take heed that you do not sacrifice to your own net, nor burn incense to your own drag, and glorify your own experience as if you made yourself strong and rich in the things of God. We are bound to render all the thanksgiving unto God—it is meet that it should be so.

Look how the apostle puts it, "We are bound to thank God always for you." I like the modesty of that. He does not so much say that he did thank God, though he did do so, but in deep humility he admits the debt which he could not fully pay. He did not judge his thanksgivings to be sufficient, but owned that he was still under bonds to render more praise.

I rejoice to be bound with these bonds, to be bound to thank God every day, and all the day. I wear these golden fetters and count them my best ornaments. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar." I would be bound over, not to keep the peace, but to keep praise forever. Let the altar of incense be always burning, yea, flaming higher and higher with the sweet spices of love and gratitude. Blessed be God for what He is doing for His people, when He causes their faith to grow. For it is a blessing so immense, so incalculable, that our praises ought to rise to the height and glory of loud-sounding hallelujahs.

Brethren, let us bless God for every good man we know whose faith has grown, for every holy woman whose love in the church is manifest unto all. And when we have done so, let us turn our eye to

God, and say, "Lord, make me such a one that others may glorify God in me also. I am as yet sadly weak and undeveloped—make me to grow till all Your image shall be seen in me, and my fellow Christians shall bless God concerning me."

Thus I have set growth in faith before you as a subject for thanksgiving. It is indeed a jewel worth more than both the Indies.

II. In the second place, it is worthy to have AN OBJECT FOR DILIGENT ENDEAVOR.

If you have it not, labor speedily to attain it. As the merchantman seeks goodly pearls, so seek a growing faith. Covet earnestly the best gifts and the noblest graces. Never be self-satisfied, but cry with Jabez, "Oh that the LORD would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast."

Why? Because the proof of faith lies in the growth of faith. If you have a dead faith, it will always be the same—but if you have the faith of God's elect, it must grow. If I heard of a child that was born some years ago, and had never grown, I should begin to guess that my friend was entrapping me, and that the child was dead from birth. Life in its earliest stages is ever attended with growth.

Brother, you must have more faith, or we shall fear that you have no faith. You must have more love, or else for sure you have no love at all. That which does not grow unto God does not live unto God.

We ought to have more faith because God's truth deserves it. It ought to be the easiest thing in the world for us to trust God. To believe every word of the Lord should be an act to which we need not to be exhorted. It should be as natural as for the lungs to heave, or the heart to beat.

We ought, as children of God, to believe our Father by instinct, even as young eaglets hide under the mother's wing. We ought to exercise faith even as the eye sees, and the ear hears, because thereunto we were created by the Holy Spirit. It should be a necessity of our spiritual existence, that we must and will trust the Lord Jesus Christ yet more and more.

I pray that it may be so, for unbelief is a horrible crime. Have you doubted God? Have you in any sense mistrusted Him? Have you limited the Holy One of Israel? Then continue not the slave of such a sin, but give unto God your heart's confidence from this time henceforth, and forever.

Moreover, we ought to grow in faith, because it will be so much for our own spiritual health, and strength, and joy. Does Little-faith know what it might be, and do, and enjoy if it could only quit its littleness? There are many ways of being a Christian, as there are many ways of being an Englishman—but all are not equally desirable. I may be an Englishman in banishment, or in the workhouse, or in prison, but I prefer to be an Englishman at home, in health, and at liberty.

So you may be a Christian, and be weak, timorous, and sad, but this is not desirable. It is better to be a happy, holy, vigorous, useful Christian. As your being an Englishman does not depend on your health or wealth, so neither does your salvation turn upon the strength or joy of your faith—yet much does depend on it.

Why not glorify God on the road to heaven? Why not have foretastes of it now? It is not my desire to go through the world in miserable style, singing always—

"Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?"

Infinitely I do prefer to so trust God that my peace may be like a river, and my righteousness like the waves of the sea. Look at the difference between Abraham, the Father of the faithful, and his nephew Lot. Lot was righteous, but he was by no means so strong in faith as Abraham, neither was he so great or so happy.

Abraham is calm, bold, and royal—Lot is greedy, timid, trembling. Lot, in Sodom, is with difficulty made to run for his life—while Abraham alone with God is interceding for others. Lot escapes from a burning city with the loss of all things, while Abraham dwells peacefully with the Lord who is the possessor of heaven and earth.

Abraham's faith makes him rise like some lone Alp till he touches the very heaven of God. It is well to be Lot, but it is infinitely better to be Abraham. Do seek the highest degree of faith, for if this be in you and abound, you shall not be barren or unfruitful. Heaven lies that way. More faith, more rest of heart. To grow heavenly we must grow more believing.

The question is, *how* is this to be done? How is my faith to be made to grow exceedingly? I have already told you that it is the work of the Holy Spirit, but still He uses us for the increase of our own faith. If we are to grow in faith, certain evils are to be avoided with scrupulous care.

Avoid continual change of doctrine. If you have a tree in your garden, and you transplant it often, it will yield you scanty fruit. Those who are everything by turns, and nothing long, are "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Unstable as water, they shall not excel.

Those brethren who believe this today, and that tomorrow, and the other thing the next day, do not believe anything in downright earnest. They cannot grow, they are not rooted and grounded. Like the moon, they are always changing, and what light they have is cold and sickly. He who can change his religion has none to change. Those who prefer philosophy to Christ never knew Him.

Then, again, if you had a tree, and did not transplant it, but began to dig away the earth from it, removing the ground in which it stood, you would impoverish it, and prevent its fruitfulness. I know certain professors who are giving up the ground which their souls should grow in. One doctrine after another is forsaken, till nothing is held to be important. They do not believe much now, and they are on the line to believe nothing at all.

The experiment of the Frenchman, who had just brought his horse to live on a straw a day, when it died, is being repeated among us, faith being literally starved to death. What low diet do some men prescribe for their souls! Marrow and fatness they do not even smell at! How can your faith grow when vital truths are abandoned or held with feeble grasp? Oh for a band of Puritan believers! Oh for a troop of spiritual Ironsides!

Next, a tree cannot grow if it is shut out from sun, and rain, and dew. Without heavenly influences we must be barren. Plant a little tree right under a great oak so that it is always in the shade, and it cannot grow. Clear the big tree away, or the sapling will dwindle to death.

Some men's faith cannot grow because it is overshadowed by worldliness, by tolerated sin, by love of riches, by the pride of life, by cares of lower things. The pursuit of Christ crucified must be all-absorbing, or it will be ineffectual. To know what you believe, and to abide steadfast in it, is the way to be robust in faith. Men whose hearts are not in their trades, men who chop and change—these are the men whose names appear in the *Gazette*—are not many spiritual bankruptcies due to the same cause?

There are methods which the spiritual husbandman uses to cause faith to grow. First, faith groweth by an increase of *knowledge*. Many persons doubt because they are not instructed. Some doubt whether they shall hold on to the end. They are ignorant of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints.

Some are in despair because they find evil desires arising in their hearts. They do not know the teaching of Scripture as to the two natures, and the warfare between flesh and spirit. Many think themselves condemned because they cannot wholly keep the law. They forget that they are justified by faith.

A great deal of unbelief vanishes when knowledge, like the morning sun, drives away the mists. Unbelief is an owl of the night, and when the sun arises it hides away in a dark corner. Study the Word of God, give your heart to searching it, seek to get at the inner teaching, and learn the analogy of faith, practice deep-sea fishery, and you will reach those mysterious truths which are the secret riches of the soul. These truths are much despised now, but those who rejoice in them will find their faith growing exceedingly.

Better still than mere knowledge, which alone would puff you up, faith groweth by *experience*. When a man has tried and proved a thing, then his confidence in it is largely increased. Take a promise and test it, and then you will say, "I know that is so." When you have tested it again, and again, and

again, nobody will be able to shake you, for you will say, "I have tasted and handled of this good word. I have made it my own, and I am not to be driven from it."

The experienced Christian is the established Christian. The man who proved all things is the man who holds fast that which is good. God give grace to increase our faith by knowledge and by experience!

Faith also grows by much *meditation and walking with God*. If you want to believe in a man, you must know him. Half the disputes between Christian people arise from their not knowing one another. There is a hymn of Mr. Sankey's which I venture to alter thus—

"When we know each other better,
The mists will roll away."

When we know each other, our suspicions, prejudices, and dislikes will speedily disappear. I am sure it is so with our God. When you walk with Him, when your communion with Him is close and constant, your faith in Him will grow exceedingly.

Some of you, I am afraid, do not give five minutes in the day to meditation. You are in too great a hurry for that. In London life men get up in a hurry even as they went to bed in a hurry and slept in a hurry. They swallow their breakfast in a hurry. They have no time to digest it. The bell is ringing at the station, and they must hurry to catch the train. They reach business in a hurry, they hurry through it, and they hurry to get back from it.

Men cannot think, for they have barely time to wink their eyes. As to an hour's meditation, and reading the Scriptures, and communing with God, many professors nowadays would think they committed robbery against the god of this world if they took half-an-hour out of his service to give it to fellowship with the world to come. If our faith is to grow exceedingly, we must maintain constant communion with God.

Another way of increasing faith is by much *prayer*. Pray for faith and pray with faith, thus shall your soul become firm in its reliance on the promises. It is while we wrestle with the angel that we find out our weakness, as the sinew of our thigh shrinks. But at the same time we prove our God-given strength, since as princes we wrestle with God and prevail. Power from prayer as well as power in prayer is what we want. On our knees we gather strength, till doubting and fearing disappear.

We must be careful to render *obedience to God*. A man cannot trust God while he lives in sin, every act of disobedience weakens confidence in God. Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God, and he that trusts God, obeys God. He that is without faith is without works, and He that is without works is without faith. Do not oppose faith and good works to one another, for there is a blessed relationship between them—and if you abound in obedience your faith shall grow exceedingly.

Again, faith groweth by *exercise*. The man who uses the little faith he has will get more faith. But he that says, "I have not enough faith for such and such work," and therefore shrinks back, shall become more and more timid, till at last, like a coward, he runs away. Go forward with your little faith, and to your surprise it shall have grown as you have advanced. Accomplish much, and then endeavor something more, and something more.

I have often used an illustration taken from a person who teaches the art of growing taller. I do not believe in that art. We shall not add a cubit to our stature just yet. But part of this professor's exercise is, that in the morning, when you get up, you are to reach as high as ever you can, and aim a little higher every morning, though it be only the hundredth part of an inch. By that means you are to grow.

This is so with faith. Do all you can, and then do a little more. And when you can do that, then do a little more than you can. Always have something in hand that is greater then your present capacity. Grow up to it, and when you have grown up to it, grow more. By many little additions a great house is

built. Brick by brick up rose the pyramid. Believe and yet believe. Trust and have further trust. Hope shall become faith, and faith shall ripen to full assurance and perfect confidence in God Most High.

This then, brethren, is what I commend to you. May God the Holy Ghost help you all to go from faith to faith.

III. Finally, this growing faith becomes THE CENTER OF OTHER CHRISTIAN GRACES.

"Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." A firm faith in Gospel verities will make us love one another, for each doctrine of truth is an argument for love. If you believe in God as having chosen His people, you will love His elect. If you believe in Christ as having made atonement for His people, you will love His redeemed, and seek their peace.

If you believe in the doctrine of regeneration, and know that we must be born again, you will love the regenerate. Whatever doctrine it is that is true, it ministers toward the love of the heart. I am sure you will find a deep, firm, fervent unity with one another in those that hold the truth in the love of it. If you are not filled with brotherly love, it must be because you are not firmly believing that truth which works toward love.

Firmness in the faith ministers toward the unity of the church. The church at Thessalonica did not have secession, or a split, as some call it. The church at Thessalonica did not divide under the pressure of persecution. They adhered closely to one another, and the more they were hammered, the more they were consolidated. They were welded into one solid mass by the hammer of persecution and the fire of love, and the reason was because they each one held the truth with all firmness.

I am always afraid of a church that is made up of mixed elements, when some are Calvinistic, some Arminian, some Baptist, and some Paedobaptist. When the minister who holds them together dies, they will disintegrate. When certain reasons that now make them cohere cease to exist, the church will divide like quicksilver, each little bit breaking into smaller bits, and so they will go rolling about in innumerable factions.

But given a church that holds the truth firmly, with deep and strong faith, then if the pastor dies, or twenty pastors die, they believe in a Pastor who lives forever, and whoever comes or does not come, the truth they hold, holds them in living unity.

I cannot imagine a greater blessing for you as a church in years to come than for each man and woman to be intelligently established in the truth you have received. Who shall separate the men who are one in Christ by the grip of mighty faith? I commend firm faith to you with all my heart, as the source of love and the means of unity in years to come.

This faith breeds patience in men, and patience assists love. Truth to tell, God's people are, some of them, a singular tribe. A countryman was accustomed to say that if God had not chosen His people before they were born, He would never have done so afterwards. There is truth in that saying. Therefore if a man loves his fellow Christians as an act of mere nature, he will often feel himself baffled. He will say, "They acted very unkindly to me. Who can love people that are so ill-mannered, so ungrateful?"

But when faith is strong, you will say, "What is that to me? I love them for Christ's sake. If I am to have a reward, it shall come from my Lord Christ. As for God's people, I love them despite their faults, over the head of the mistaken judgments they form of me, I love all my brethren." The way to make men better is not to be always censuring them, but to love them better.

The quickest way to win a sinner is to love him to Christ. The quickest way to sanctify a believer is to love him into purity and holiness. Only faith can do this. May faith, therefore, grow exceedingly, for faith by working patience helps us to bear with others. If there be anything grand, and good, and desirable, anything Christ-like, anything God-like, the way to it is to let your faith grow exceedingly. If this church is to become a missionary church more and more, as I pray God it may, your faith must grow exceedingly.

If you are to stand fast as a breakwater in these times of departure from the faith once delivered to the saints, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to be made a blessing to this wicked city, and shine like a lighthouse over this sea of London, your faith must grow exceedingly.

If God has brought you as a church, together with other churches, to the kingdom for such a time as this, if you are to achieve your destiny, and work for God and glorify His name, your faith must grow exceedingly.

The man who is timorous and faint-hearted, let him go home. He is not fit for the day of battle. The age requires heroes. The chicken-hearted are out of their place in this perilous century. You that know what you know, and believe what you believe, whose tramp is that of fearless warriors, you have a high calling—fulfill it. You shall see what God will do for you and with you, and it shall be written in the pages of eternity that at such a time the church grew in its faith, and therefore God used it for His glory. May it be so.

May those among us who have no faith be led to Jesus. O believers, try your own faith by speaking to unbelievers as they go away this morning. This afternoon in the Sunday school, prove your faith by winning your dear children for Christ. Try your faith every day in the week by giving sinners no rest until they come to Christ.

God bless you each one for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
2 THESSALONIANS 1 AND 2

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—33, 34, 686

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.