

*1 Thessalonians 3:5-10***PREFACE**

As is my wont, when I began looking at this passage—verses 6-10 in 1 Thessalonians—I wondered how best to approach it, to organize it, to teach it. When I reached v10 I was suddenly reminded of a passage in Colossians where Paul used the same disturbing word: “lacking”—only in that letter it has an even more troubling context. After cogitating on v10, I then realized that before digging into the fullness of this passage, we must pause to consider the fullness of this common church word we bandy about so casually: “faith.”

**LACKING****Read Colossians 1:24.**

At a glance, that is a worrisome statement; what in the world could possibly have been “lacking” in Christ’s afflictions? First off, this word does not mask a more genteel definition: it means precisely what we imagine it does.

**lacking** = *husterēmata* = from <G5302> (hustereo); **a deficit**; specially poverty :- **that which is behind**, (that which was) lack (-ing), penury, **want**; **deficient, the shortcomings**, the lacks or left-overs.

So we find no solace in the definition of the Greek, no rounding off of the word’s sharp edges.

Oddly enough, this verse in Colossians is set just after Paul’s eloquent treatise on the *sufficiency* of Christ:

- firstborn of all creation
- creator
- image of the invisible God
- the fullness of God
- before all things, and in Him all things hold together
- the head of the church
- first place in everything

So what could possibly have been “lacking”? Well, when we dug into the text we discovered that, whereas at a glance we might naturally interpret “Christ’s afflictions” to mean His suffering on the cross, the word *thlipsis* is never used in the NT of Christ’s redemptive suffering on the cross. But it is used to describe His and His followers’ *ministerial suffering*—the suffering they experience because of their allegiance to Christ. So this is what Paul means: not suggesting at all that the cross was somehow deficient, or incomplete, but that Christ’s afflictions continue on in His church.

**Back to 1 Thessalonians.**

At the end of our passage in 1 Thessalonians, Paul does a similar thing. After going on and on about the wonderful faith of the church in Thessalonica, Paul uses the same word, “lacking,” in v10.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10.**

In our next session we will dig into the fulness of verses 6-10, but today I want to spend some time examining that which is compelled by this phrase, “complete what is lacking in your faith,” and what is so ubiquitous in our vernacular—indeed, the vernacular even of the world’s culture—the simple, yet profound word, “faith.”

**See handout.**

As I read our passage, backing up to include v5, note the highlighted references to faith.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 3:5-10.**

### SANCTIFICATION

We make a mistake, and we severely handicap our relationship with God in Christ, when we think of it as something established, finished, static. “I’m saved—and that’s that.” Instead, we are to think of our relationship with God in Christ as *dynamic*. We have often discussed this regarding the term “sanctification”—that is, there is indeed an aspect of sanctification that is complete: we are once and for all made holy by Christ’s sacrifice.

**Read Hebrews 10:8-10.**

In the same passage, however—just as he does in Chapter Two of Hebrews (2:11)—in addition to referencing the established fact of sanctification, the writer references the *ongoing process* of sanctification.

**Read Hebrews 10:14. (ESV or NKJV)**

“...are being sanctified” is the preferred translation, since it is the present passive articular participle of *hagiazō*.

In our studies I have often associated this process of sanctification with what I call our “upward glide-slope to heaven”—what the prophet Isaiah termed “the Highway of Holiness.”

**Read Isaiah 35:8-9.**

At conversion (**from flesh-kind to spirit-kind**) we are once-for-all sanctified by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. But at the moment of conversion we also find ourselves on the threshold of—just the starting point—of that upward glide-slope to heaven. As we grow and mature in Christ we rise higher, closer to His likeness. The active, dynamic, attentive Christian does not spend the rest of his time on earth traveling a level path of mediocrity, then, at death, suddenly vaults through the golden gates. No, over his remaining lifetime he treads a path that gradually slopes upward toward Christ-likeness.

### FAITH

Just so “faith.” Our culture today has ground down the hard granite of this word into a fine talc that is utterly worthless. We all have heard, and no doubt we all have used the term, “a person of faith.” But what does that really mean? **[answer: nothing at all]** I can have faith in myself; faith in another person; faith in Sobek, the crocodile god of the Nile; faith in a crystal to cure every ache and pain in my body—all of these would make me a person of faith.

Faith is a one-time event: At conversion we purposefully place our faith, or trust, in Jesus Christ; that is what marks us a Christian, or Christ-ian. That act, if sincere and authentic, need never be repeated. It is good for eternity—but it *is* essential. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that

...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Faith, after all, is so essential that it comes from God Himself:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9; cf. John 6)

But God's word makes it clear that faith, like sanctification, is also an ongoing process, with ebbs and flows, with ups and downs, mountain-tops and deep valleys. In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul shows that he is very much aware of the fragility of human faith. ([Look again at handout](#))

- *v5: I also sent to find out about your faith*  
He honestly didn't know what might have happened to their faith since his departure
- *v6: good news of your faith*  
Yes, it was in good condition right now
- *v7: we were comforted about you through your faith*  
to the extent that Paul took strength in it
- *v8: if you stand firm in the Lord*  
But this doesn't mean that this is a permanent condition; their faith could still waver
- *v10: and may complete what is lacking in your faith*  
Because of this Paul wants to reconnect with the Thessalonians to bolster their faith, to continue their education and growth in this vital connection they have with God in Christ

### Turn to Romans 14.

In the fourteenth chapter of Romans Paul speaks at length about how faith differs from person to person.

### Read Romans 14:1.

**weak** = *astheneo* = from <G772> (asthenes); **to be feeble** (in any sense) :- be **diseased, impotent** folk (man), (be) sick, (be, be made) weak.

In v4 Paul makes it clear that this is not a fatal condition, but that God is at work in the lives of both the one of weak faith and the one of strong faith.

### Read Romans 14:4.

In v22 we see that in many respects, our faith—i.e., the maturity level of our faith—is a private thing; there is no universal standard.

NASB: The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.  
ESV: The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.

What *is* universal is the call for our faith, at whatever level it may be, to grow—to deepen and mature. We know from Scripture that faith in any individual will naturally—that is, *involuntarily*—have its ups and downs. But more than that we are to make it our occupation to *voluntarily*, purposefully increase our faith. After all, God has given us our spiritual leaders not just to win souls, but to instruct and encourage the maturing of faith in those who already believe.

### **Read Ephesians 4:11-14.**

Why? Well in a large part to stop (or at least minimize) that involuntary ebb and flow of faith so common to man.

**As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; (Ephesians 4:14)**

So, just as with sanctification (holiness), an individual's faith is meant to travel that upward glide-slope to heaven. Day by day, in incremental steps, our faith is to be rising, deeper, more grounded, more knowledgeable, more mature, until the day when our faith becomes sight.

And what happens to our faith if it is not growing, increasing? Well, what happens to anything moving forward on an incline when it stops advancing? It begins to slide backwards. The idea of remaining static in the Christian life does not reflect reality. Regarding both sanctification and faith, when one is not progressing, one is regressing; when one is not advancing upward, one is slipping backwards.

If our faith is not deepening, maturing, it is not static but growing weaker. Not just God's word, but personal experience bears this out.

Let's close with a passage from Colossians that puts it in perspective.

### **Read Colossians 3:1a. [only]**

Now, if we stopped there, we might imagine it continuing with "...take your ease, since your salvation is in the bag." But in fact what follows is truly amazing.

### **Read Colossians 3:1-4.**

Even when we are "in Christ"—a redeemed, justified, sanctified Christian—we are to

- keep seeking the things above
- set our mind on things above

Every believer is to have a faith that never stops traveling upward, on that "Highway of Holiness," that upward glide-slope to heaven.

## THE SLIDING SCALE OF FAITH

For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? *(1 Thessalonians 3:5-10)*

Session 14

