

## CONCERNING INOCULATION—“WE TOLD YOU BEFOREHAND”

1 Thes. 3:4 – For even when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to be afflicted, even as it also came to pass and you know.

First Thessalonians 3:4 shows us that the apostles practiced inoculating the believers under their care to equip them so that when affliction came they would not be “shaken” by the “tempter,” Satan (v. 3, 5). In speaking of the coming afflictions, verse three says in part, “for you yourselves know that we are appointed for this.” The believers in Thessalonica could “know” this because the apostle Paul had previously warned them, saying, “we told you beforehand that we are to be afflicted” (v. 4). The Greek word translated told in this verse is in the imperfect tense, indicating that Paul repeatedly told them. According to Acts 17:1-2, Paul likely spent less than a month with the Thessalonians. His desire was that he could soon return to them in order to “complete the things that are lacking in your faith” (1 Thes. 3:10). Yet, even though his time with them was short, Paul took the opportunity to inoculate them. From the example of Paul’s care for the Thessalonians we see the principle that we should inoculate those under our care both early and repeatedly as a crucial factor in the preservation of their faith in the face of persecution and affliction (v. 7).

The New Testament is full of inoculating words. The Lord Jesus warned his disciples about the affliction that was to come upon them so that when persecution did occur the disciples “would not be stumbled” (John 16:1). He warned His disciples that religious persons would put them “out of the synagogues” and that “an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God” (v. 2; see also, Matt. 10:16-18). The Lord then explained the reason those who care for their religion would do such things: “Because they have not known the Father nor Me” (John 16:3). This raises an important point. Those who would oppose the Lord’s followers value their religion more than knowing the Lord Himself. The Lord warned against the teaching of religionists who leaven the truth and persecute the Lord’s followers (Matt. 16:6, 11-12, 16-18). Those who oppose the healthy teaching (2 Tim. 4:3) spread evil reports about and defame those who minister life to the Lord’s people (2 Cor. 6:8; 1 Cor. 4:13). All organized religion, as the New Testament and church history demonstrate, seeks to “kill,” if not physically then spiritually, those who seek to know Christ as life (John 16:2) by severing them from “the joints of the rich supply” (Eph. 4:16). Hence, we who are also seeking to know the Lord as our life (John 1:4; Col. 3:4) should not be caught unawares when persecution comes.<sup>1</sup>

### Principles for Administering an Inoculation

In the physical realm inoculation means to expose someone to a small amount of a germ in order that they would build up antibodies to protect them from later contracting the actual disease. Whereas an antidote is given when someone has already been exposed to the germ, an inoculation is given before exposure. To wait until after exposure runs a great danger that the person may not recover, and those who eventually recover often require much attention and increased care. The same applies in the spiritual realm. According to the New Testament inoculation is to strengthen believers to withstand Satan’s attacks and to establish them in the faith (1 Pet. 5:8-9; Acts 14:22; 18:23; 1 Thes. 3:2).

Effective inoculation includes educating believers regarding Satan’s persecution. In John 15 the Lord told His disciples:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word which I said to you, A slave is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also; if they have kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you because of My name, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (vv. 18-21)

The apostle Paul also addressed this matter, writing, “And indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

We should inoculate young believers regarding religion’s perverting of the truth of the gospel and its slandering of those who serve in the genuine New Testament ministry (Gal. 1:6-7; 2 Cor. 6:8). In many cases, religionists distort and

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to religious persecution, Paul also warned about the dangers of human philosophy: “Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

then condemn the proper teaching (Rom. 3:8). The situation today is not different. For example, many who are respected within Christianity deny the clear teaching in the Bible that Christ is not only in the heavens bodily but is also in the believers as the Spirit (Acts 7:56; 2 Cor. 3:17) or they seek to justify division and deny the Bible's imperatives to maintain a practical, visible testimony of genuine oneness before the world (Eph. 4:3; John 17:21, 23). In 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul encouraged the believers by acknowledging that they also had become recipients of the persecution towards the Lord Jesus and the apostles who brought the good news of the gospel to them (vv. 14-15). This is in contrast to those Paul described in 2 Timothy 4:3: "For the time will come when they will not tolerate the healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears." We must choose what kind of believer we aspire to be—one approved by men or one approved by God (Acts 5:29; Gal. 1:10).

To be effective we should follow the apostle's pattern and administer inoculations early and as part of our ongoing care (1 Thes. 2:14-16; 3:3-4). An inoculation is best administered in a positive atmosphere and right after a person has responded positively to the Word or to the ministry or has entered into the enjoyment of the Lord. Furthermore, we should administer an inoculation that fits their present need, realizing that it is an ongoing part of our shepherding care for believers and not done once for all. Effective inoculations are progressive and should eventually cover the truths in the Bible which are opposed and various false accusations that have become a stumbling to many.

In order to deliver an effective inoculation, our person is of utmost importance. We need to have a living that is a pattern to the believers. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul reminded them of how the apostles conducted themselves among them. Paul was to them an exhorting and consoling father, demonstrating a walk worthy of God (1 Thes. 1:5; 2:10-12). He could say, "we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children" (v. 7). And he could testify of imparting to the Thessalonians the apostles' "not only the gospel of God but also own souls" as part of their intimate and fostering care (v. 8). Returning to John 16 we read of Jesus saying, "But these things I have spoken to you that when their hour comes you may remember them, that I told you of them. Now these things I have not said to you from the beginning, because I was with you" (v. 4, emphasis added). In this verse we see how the Lord shepherded His disciples. First, He was with them, living before them the pattern of a God-man. Then, He spoke to them certain warnings. The order is significant because it was the pattern lived out before the disciples that caused the inoculating words that were later spoken to be effective. We see the same principle with Paul (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil 3:17; 2 Tim. 3:10-11). Paul reminded the Thessalonians, saying, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, even as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake" (1 Thes. 1:5). Paul knew that the conscience of the Thessalonians bore witness to the apostles' being such men without flattering speech, without pretext, yearning over the Thessalonians with tenderhearted compassion, and conducting themselves in a holy, righteous, and blameless manner (2:6, 8).

While imparting the truth is a necessary part of raising up believers under our care, the critical emphasis of our inoculation is a proper pattern, not knowledge. We may be deficient in inoculating the new ones among us because we feel unqualified in our apprehension of the truth. We can be helped to overcome such feelings of insufficiency by considering the following words by Brother Lee:

A mother has not only love for her child; she also has a deep concern. Only a woman with such a concern is qualified to be a proper mother. A woman may be lacking in education, but if she has a deep concern for her children, she is qualified to be a good mother. Of course, knowledge and ability are helpful, but they are not prerequisites. The unique prerequisite for being a good mother is concern. (*Life-study of Second Corinthians*, 387)

## **Conclusion**

The New Testament presents us with a pattern of inoculation by the Lord Himself and His apostles. In our care for and raising up of the new ones among us for the building up of the Body of Christ we also need the proper practice of inoculation to preserve the faith of those under our care in the face of persecution and affliction and to foster their growth in the Christian life. To do this we must become a proper pattern and care for the believers out of an intimate concern (1 Thes. 2:7, 11). Brother Lee encouraged us to take this way, saying, "Nothing touches people as much as our loving care for them. In order to nourish and raise our spiritual children in an adequate way, we must have an intimate concern for them. If we learn to lovingly care for the new ones, we will gain much increase" (*CWWL*, 1990, vol. 1, 110).