

1 Thessalonians Chapter 3

1 Thessalonians 3:1 "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;"

“No longer forbear”: The agony of separation between spiritual parent, Paul, and his children in Thessalonica became unbearably painful (verse 5).

“Left at Athens alone”: Paul and Silas stayed behind while Timothy returned (verse 2). This would not be the last time that Timothy went to a church in Paul’s place (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 2:19-24; 1 Tim. 1:3).

1 Thessalonians 3:2 "And sent Timothy, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:"

“Establish ... comfort ... faith”: This was a common ministry concern and practice of Paul (Acts 14:22; 15:32; 18:23). Paul’s concern did not focus on health, wealth, self-esteem, or ease of life, but rather the spiritual quality of life.

Their faith was of supreme importance in Paul’s mind as evidenced by 5 mentions (in verses 1-10). Faith includes the foundation of the body of doctrine (Jude 3), and their believing response to God in living out that truth (Heb. 11:6).

“Minister of God”: is a variant reading, probably substituted for “God’s fellow workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Paul's desire was to lead these Thessalonians into all truth. The very next best thing to being there himself would be to send Timothy. We have discussed before, that a Christian never stands still. If the Christian is not growing in the Lord, he will be losing ground. This is the very purpose of Timothy going.

He will get them off the milk and honey of Christianity and get them to the meat of Christianity. There is a growth in the Lord that comes from feeding on His Words every day. There is also, a growth that comes from facing problems and overcoming them with the Word of God.

Paul is highly recommending Timothy to them. He will build them up in their most holy faith.

1 Thessalonians 3:3 "That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto."

“Appointed”: God had promised Paul future sufferings when He commended him to ministry through Ananias (Acts 9:16).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians of this divine appointment so that they would not think that:

(1) God’s plan was not working out as evidenced by Paul’s troubles, or

(2) Paul's afflictions demonstrated God's displeasure with him.

To think that way would upset the church's confidence in Paul and fulfill Satan's deceptive purposes (verse 5; 2 Cor. 4:8-15; 6:1-10; 11:23-27; 12:7-10).

The word "afflictions" is the same as tribulations. Let's look at what Jesus had to say about the Christians having tribulation.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

You might say, why do we have tribulation?

Romans 5:3-5 "And not only [so], but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;" "And patience, experience; and experience, hope:" "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

You can easily see the reason for tribulation, is to make us strong in the Lord. We must realize that we are nothing in and of ourselves. We realize that our strength is in Christ our Lord. Jesus, our leader, was afflicted, and we will be too if we are His.

1 Thessalonians 3:4 "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know."

"Suffer tribulation": Paul had told them to expect him to suffer as he had already suffered before this Thessalonian experience (2:14-16; Acts 13:14). During (Acts 17:1-9), and following (Acts 17:10-18:11), his time at Thessalonica, Paul also knew tribulation.

The life of a Christian is not without problems (regardless of what some tell you). It is a life of self-sacrifice. Many ministers today are promising things to their converts that are not realistic.

We must learn to live victoriously during the problems. It rains on the just and on the unjust, but Christians have someone to go to in their time of trouble. We have Jesus to help us.

Romans 8:35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

Romans 8:38-39 "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come," "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 Thessalonians 3:5 "For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain."

"Know your faith": Paul was anxious to know the spiritual condition of this assembly.

“The tempter”: Satan had already been characterized as a hinderer (2:18), and now as a tempter in the sense of trying/testing for the purpose of causing failure (Matt. 4:3; 1 Cor. 7:5; Jam. 1:12-18).

Paul was not ignorant of Satan’s schemes (2 Cor. 2:11; 11:23), not vulnerable to his methods (Eph. 6:11). So Paul took action to counterattack Satan’s expected maneuver and to assure that all his efforts were not useless (2:1).

Paul is aware that they have faced great tribulation, and he is not fully persuaded that they were able to handle the crisis. He is sending Timothy to check, and see if they stayed faithful. Paul knows exactly how the devil works. He will bring so great a temptation in our weakest area that many will fall.

He just cannot wait to find out if they had withstood or not. He is praying that they stood, because he had given them a strong enough foothold in the Word that they would not fall. If they fall, he feels his effort was in vain.

1 Thessalonians 3:6 "But now when Timothy came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also [to see] you:"

“Your faith and charity”: Timothy returned to report the Thessalonians’ trust in God, their response to one another, and to Paul’s ministry. This news convinced Paul that Satan’s plans to disrupt God’s work had not been successful and settled Paul’s anxiety (verse 7).

By the time Paul wrote this, he had already heard from Timothy that they had withstood the great temptation. He is delighted that they held strong in their faith and charity. Paul was pleased that they wanted him to come back and minister to them. He reminds them that he desires to come and see them as much as they want him to come.

1 Thessalonians 3:7 "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:"

Paul was very pleased that his spiritual children had been strong in the faith. It seems Paul's afflictions and distress never stopped. Jesus had told Paul, He would show him what great things he would suffer. One of the highest callings we can have, is to suffer for Christ. Just to know that their faith had been so strong encouraged Paul.

1 Thessalonians 3:8 "For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

“Stand fast”: Pictured here is an army that refuses to retreat even though it is being assaulted by the enemy. This is a frequent Pauline injunction (1 Cor. 16:13; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 6:11, 13-14; Phil. 1:27; 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:15).

We see from this, Paul has had new life breathed into his weary soul, because these, his converts, have kept the faith. When one Christian stands fast in the Lord, it gives the others courage to stand.

1 Thessalonians 3:9 "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;"

“Render”: (Greek antapodidomi) has the sense of paying back something owed. Paul repays God in the currency of thanksgiving.

“Joy”: Paul, like John (3 John verse 4), found the highest sense of ministry joy in knowing that his children in the faith were growing and walking in the truth. It led him to the worship of God in thanksgiving and rejoicing.

Paul is so grateful of their stand for Christ; he has nothing to pray for them, but praise to God. Again, this is like a parent thanking God for a child who has been obedient to God. What a joy comes in knowing someone you led to the Lord has this much strength and stamina in God. Paul's joy is in his heart.

1 Thessalonians 3:10 "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?"

“Praying”: As to frequency, Paul prayed night and day just as he worked night and day (2:9). As to fervency, Paul prayed super-abundantly (Eph. 2:20).

“Perfect” (literally complete): Paul’s stay with the Thessalonians was so brief that he could not complete the work to his satisfaction. He longed for the opportunity to remedy the deficiencies (That which is Lacking), in their faith.

“Lacking”: Paul was not criticizing the church but rather acknowledging that they had not yet reached their full potential, for which he prayed and labored (verse 10). The themes of (chapters 4-5), deal with areas of this lack.

We see from the "night and day", that Paul continuously prays for them. He prays in earnest. Paul desires to come and minister to them that they might continue to grow in this most holy faith they have begun in.

Romans 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

1 Thessalonians 3:11 "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you."

“Direct our way unto you”: Paul knew that Satan had hindered his return (2:18). Even though Timothy had visited and returned with a good report, Paul still felt the urgency to see his spiritual

children again. Paul followed the biblical admonition of the Psalms (Psalm 37:1-5), and Proverbs (Prov. 3:5-6), to entrust difficult situations to God.

God Himself is our Father. This is showing the unity of Jesus Christ and God the Father. They are one in Spirit. They are one in purpose. When we pray, we pray to the Father in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the Way. Paul is praying that he will be able to see them again. Only God can cause this to be. Paul went where God sent him.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you:"

“Love one toward another”: With over 30 positive and negative “one anothers”, in the New Testament, love appears by far most frequently (4:9; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11; 2 John 5). It is the overarching term that includes all the other “one anothers.” Its focus is on believers in the church.

“Toward all men”: In light of the fact that God loved the world and sent His Son to die for human sin (John 3:16), believers who were loved when they were unlovely (Rom. 5:8), are to love unbelievers. Other New Testament commands concerning all men include pursuing peace (Rom. 12:18), doing good (Gal. 6:10), being patient (Phil. 4:5), praying (1 Tim. 2:1), showing consideration (Titus 3:2), and honoring (1 Peter 2:17).

The type of love spoken of here is the unselfish God love for all of mankind. He loves us even when we are unlovable. If we have taken on the name Christian (Christ-like), then we must have that unselfish love for every single person in the human race, that Christ had. The world loves, because of what we can do for them, or what we can give them.

God loves us in spite of all of our faults, asking nothing in return, except that we believe on Him. We must learn to love with the same kind of love that God has for us.

Mark 12:30 "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this [is] the first commandment." "And the second [is] like, [namely] this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

1 Thessalonians 3:13 "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

“Unblameable in holiness”: Paul prayed that there would be no grounds of accusation because of un-holiness (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Peter 5:16-17; Jude 24).

“Coming of our Lord: Again, Paul used the term parousia to refer to Christ’s second coming, repeating it for special emphasis.

“His Saints”: Since this exact term is not used elsewhere in the New Testament of angels, but is commonly used for believers, it is best to understand the coming of the Lord to rapture all His church and take them to heaven to enjoy His presence.

“Saints” used here in the masculine plural, refers to holy people. These may be believers (see Eph. 1:1; 1 Thess. 4:14), or angels (see Mark 8:38). Considering the problem cited in chapter 4, the former idea is likely in view here.

If we love the way Paul was speaking of (in verse 12), then we will be established in our hearts unblameable before God. We will be in right standing with the Father, because we have washed in the blood of the Lamb (Jesus), and been made righteous and holy before the Father.

The Christians are the saints. Jesus is coming as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the saints will reign with Him.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 3 Questions

1. Where had Paul gone to from Corinth?
2. Who does the "we" include in verse 1?
3. Where did Paul want to go?
4. Who did Paul send in his place to Thessalonica?
5. What happens, if a Christian is not growing?
6. Timothy will take them off the _____ and _____ and feed them the meat of the Word.
7. What are 2 ways the Christian grows?
8. What must we use to overcome problems?
9. What is another word for "afflictions"?
10. In the world you shall have _____.
11. Why do we have tribulations?
12. Where is our strength?
13. What difference is there between Christians and non-Christians at problem times?
14. What can separate the Christian from the love of God?

15. Why is Paul sending Timothy to check on them?
16. What would make Paul think he had failed with them?
17. What did Timothy report to Paul about these people?
18. In what way were these Thessalonians Paul's children?
19. What had breathed life back into Paul?
20. When Paul prayed for them to the Father, what kind of prayer did he pray?
21. How often did he pray for them?
22. What is meant by the names of God in verse 11?
23. What kind of love is spoken of in verse 12?
24. If we are truly Christian (Christ-like), what must we do?
25. What will establish our hearts unblameable before God?
26. What makes us righteous?
27. Who are the saints?