

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 3

The Big Picture

After travelling to Athens from Berea (Acts 17:10-14), Paul was burdened with concern for the fledgling church at Thessalonica which he had established just a few short weeks before. His concern was so great that when he was rejoined at Athens by Silas and Timothy, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the church was doing (1 Thessalonians 3:6). Evidently the Thessalonian church was under intense pressure by both the civil authorities (Acts 17:8), and the jealous Jews (Acts 17:5). Paul's concern was that the church would cave in under this persecution and so deep was his concern over this he had to find out how things were going. When Timothy's report came back to Paul while at Corinth, Paul was overjoyed to hear of the faith and perseverance of this Church. In this chapter we find his overflowing joy based on the faithfulness of the Thessalonians.

1 *Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;*

Paul now speaks to the Thessalonian believers of his intense concern for them. In the last chapter we read that evidently someone had said that Paul did not care for the Thessalonian believers and that is why he did not return to visit. Paul indicates that this is not the case at all, rather he was hindered in his intentions by Satan. He now elaborates on how that concern spurred him to action.

From Acts 17 we know that after Paul ministered at Thessalonica and was driven out of the city, he made his way to Berea and then to Athens. Silas and Timothy, his travelling companions, stayed in Berea for a time longer while Paul ministered in Athens alone. After a period of ministry in Athens, Paul travelled to Corinth where he ministered for some eighteen months. The date is somewhere around A.D. 50.

While at Athens, Paul had a lot of time to think. One of the things that constantly haunted him was his concern for the fledgling church at Thessalonica. They had only been in existence a few short weeks, and as such did not have the benefit of many months and years of teaching and doctrine. Not only did they have little grounding in the Word, but they were immediately thrust into a very stressful situation as they faced the open persecution of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul's concern was that they would not be able to endure this persecution, and this concern is something that was with him every minute. Far from forgetting about the Thessalonians, Paul was consumed by thoughts of them.

2 *And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:*

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

Since Paul could not make the trip to Thessalonica himself, he sent the next best thing, Timothy. Evidently, Timothy was Paul's right-hand man. From a study of Philipians we find that when Paul sent Timothy to a church, it was as though Paul himself was there.

Timothy evidently had the same concern for the churches as Paul, and it was this man that Paul sent to Thessalonica to find out how things were going.

Paul's motive for sending Timothy was multifaceted. Not only did he was a report of how things were going, but he wanted Timothy to encourage and strengthen this young church. By sending Timothy, Paul was in essence sending himself in order to establish this church and to help them deal with any issues troubling them.

In verse three we find out specifically what the major issue was, and that was the persecution being faced by this church. Satan has always tried to turn people away from God by using persecution. Paul's concern was that this young church would become disheartened and turn from God because of their trials. Paul reminds them that while he was there, he taught them in no uncertain terms that trials are part of the life of the believer, and that these trials are not to be seen as surprising. Suffering persecution is a normal part of the Christian life. We are reminded of Christ's words in 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.*"

Timothy and Paul

1) Timothy is mentioned more than any other of Paul's companions.

Acts 16:2-3	lived in Lystra and Derbe area (Galatia)
Acts 17:14	in Thessalonica with Silas
Acts 18:5	in Corinth with Silas
Acts 19:22	sent to Macedonia (Thessalonica and Berea?)
Acts 20:4	sent to Macedonia
1 Corinthians 4:17	sent to Corinth by Paul
2 Corinthians 1:19	sent to Corinth
2 Corinthians 1:1	with Paul when writing 2 Corinthians
Philippians 1:1	with Paul when writing Philippians
Philippians 2:19	sent to Philippi by Paul
Colossians 1:1	with Paul when writing Colossians
1 Thessalonians 1:1	with Paul when writing 1 Thessalonians
1 Thessalonians 3:1	sent to Thessalonica
2 Thessalonians 1:1	with Paul when writing 2 Thessalonians

2) Paul considered Timothy his son in the faith. In fact, Paul often used Timothy as a general trouble-shooter. Timothy was sent to Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), Macedonia (Acts 19:22), Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), Philippi (Phil 2:19), and Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1).

3) Timothy was with Paul in the writing of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Thessalonians.

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.

One of the errors prevalent in the Church today is that suffering for the Christian is abnormal. We are told that if we suffer trials and tribulations it is because we lack faith, are living in sin, or are failing to assert our authority as children of God. Nothing could be further from the

truth. Suffering is a normal part of the Christian life, lack of suffering is abnormal. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he taught them this on multiple occasions and that they should not become disheartened when the promised persecutions come to pass.

What Would Happen If Job Lived Today?

What advice would Job get if he were alive today. Suppose instead of being visited by Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz, and Elihu, Job would have been visited by Robert Schuller, Kenneth Hagin, Morris Cerulo, and Bob Tilton?

Job: Job 3:3-7 Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein.

Shuller: What's this I am hearing. What's your problem Job! You sound like a man with no self-esteem. That's your real problem. You need to quit thinking so badly about yourself and realize that you can be an overcomer in spite of your trials. Have a positive attitude. With an outlook on life like yours, no wonder you have problems. You have such a bad self image, condemning the day of your birth, that God never can help you do anything. Believe in yourself, you are a wonderful person inside. Think positively and you can overcome any trial.

Job: Job 5:6-9 Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number:

Hagin: Come on Job, that is a cop-out. God-shmod, your problem is that you lack faith. God doesn't torment His children, he desires their prosperity and health. God used faith to create the world, you can use faith to overcome your tribulations. It is not God's fault that you are suffering, it is because you are not exercising the power of the spoken word and your God-given authority over your trials! Rebuke your trials, believe in the power of faith, and they will flee.

Job: Job 10:1-3 My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?

Tilton: No Job, you have it all wrong. God does not oppress His children, God desires that they be successful and overcomers. Your problem is that you do not believe in God's laws of prosperity, wealth, health, and success. Believe! Have faith! God wants you healthy, wealthy, and wise. Quite allowing the devil to defeat you. You have within yourself the power to overcome all of your trials, if only you have enough faith. Give me the best gift you can, and I will send you a silver coin anointed with the Holy Spirit that will bring joy and prosperity to your life. Just remember to send the best gift you can, and only God knows what your best gift is!

Job:	Job 19:2-6 How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me. And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself. If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach: Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net.
Cerullo:	Job, your real problem is Satan. He has defeated you and brought all of these trials into your life. You need to join God's victorious army and kick the devil out of your life. Rebuke him as a child of God, and he will flee. Bind him in the power of the Spirit, and he can't affect you. If I can only touch you Job, I can anoint you with the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome any and all trials. Rex's wife can pull the devil off you. The devil has his talons deep in your flesh, and only an anointing from our hands can remove him and give you victory.

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 labour be in vain.*

Paul's concern for the Thessalonian believers grew to such an extent that he could no longer wait to hear how they were doing. Timothy was sent in order to see how their faith was holding up.

In this verse Paul identifies the specific source of the persecutions faced by the Thessalonian believers, and that source was Satan. No doubt Satan was behind the Jewish opposition, and also behind the Gentile persecutions of these believers. Paul's concern was that this pressure would expose the faith of the Thessalonian believers to be a false faith, founded in the emotion of the moment and not in the transforming power of God.

One of the things we learn very clearly in the Bible is that there are two sources of faith, ourselves and God. Our faith fails, God's faith does not. Peter had great faith in his own personal ability to endure trials, and his faith was blown away instantly by three innocent questions from the crowd. Peter's self-generated faith was unable to stand the smallest threat. Until he learned to trust in God for his faith, he was weak and ineffective.

Perhaps no book in the Bible has more to say on this subject than the book of Job. We often think that the trials faced by Job was to test Job, but they weren't. They were allowed so that God could prove to Satan that true and genuine faith is an unassailable faith, a faith that endures every trial thrown in its path. The reason for this is that true faith is not from with ourselves, but from without ourselves, it is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). The faith that God gives cannot fail.

Sources of Trials for the Christian

1. **The Fallenness of Nature - Romans 8:19-23 and Genesis 3:17-19**
2. **Our Flesh - Romans 7:18-21, 7:5, and 13:14**
3. **Satan - Job 1-2, 2 Corinthians 12:7, Revelation 2:9-10, and Luke 21:31-32**
4. **Demonic Attack - 1 Samuel 16:14-16**
5. **Persecution from the World - John 15:18-25, 1 Peter 1:7**
6. **Other Sinners - Psalm 13, Psalm 10, Joshua 7**
7. **Our Own Sin - 1 Peter 2:20-21, 4:14-16, Romans 1:27**
8. **God - Genesis 22**

6 But now when Timotheus 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:

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

8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

As it turned out, Paul's concern for the church at Thessalonica was unfounded. The faith that they exhibited proved that their's was a true and genuine faith having a divine and not human origin. Instead of caving into the pressures around them, they persevered and exhibited to all that God's faith is an unassailable faith.

Paul's joy in hearing of the faith of the Thessalonian believers brought great joy to his heart as it was proof that his ministry and suffering in behalf of the Thessalonian believers was not in vain. Their persecutions proved that their faith was real, and Paul's joy knew no bounds. In fact, Paul says that he now lives. His depression over the possibility of their faith failing is gone, replaced by comfort knowing their true condition.

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;

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

What exactly was the content of Paul's joy and what was his desire after hearing of their perseverance in their trials? It was one of great thanks to God for proving himself faithful to his people. Paul saw these people as his spiritual children, and as John writes in 3 John 1:2-3, "For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.", Paul could rejoice in the faithfulness of this church. When a congregation exhibits spiritual growth and maturity it brings joy to the heart of the pastor.

Because of Paul's joy, he was not even more desirous to return to the Thessalonians and minister to them, hoping to continue teaching them and perfecting that which was lacking. The idea here is not that the faith of the Thessalonians was imperfect, rather he wanted to spend more time establishing them in the truth. These believers had only heard the Gospel for the first time a mere few weeks before, and therefore lacked the solid grounding that more mature believers have gained over a longer period of time. Paul's desire is that he be able to complete his discipleship of these believers and that he be able to ground them even further in the faith.

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

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:

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.

Paul closes this personal glimpse into his love and concern for the Thessalonians with a benediction of praise. He calls upon God to allow him to return to this congregation in order to fellowship with them and minister to them, and he calls upon God to continue his work of sanctification in the hearts of these believers in his absence.

We need to note from these verses that God is able to continue his work in spite of persecution and in spite of the lack of the teaching and ministry of spiritual leaders. That is not to say that the teaching of the Word is unimportant and one can be a strong believer without it, but it is to say that when these resources are lacking God can still do a work in the heart of a true believer. Why is that? It is because ultimately truth is learned from the Holy Spirit and not men. God may use men to minister to others, but God can also do that ministry himself.

Here is a church that is only a few weeks old, and yet their faith, labor of love, and hope is sounded throughout the entire provinces of Macedonian and Achaia. Why is that. God. God had so moved in the hearts of these believers that they were able to become spiritual mature through the ministry of the Spirit and what little they learned from Paul.

Paul's prayer to God is that they increase in their love towards one another and towards all men, including their persecutors. This love is not of human origin, but of divine origin. Only God brings this kind of love to the hearts of men, a love that loves all in spite of what one gets in return. We are reminded of Christ's words in John 13:32-33 in which he states we are to love one another as a mark of true belief, and His words in Matthew 5:44 in which we are commanded to love our enemies.

Secondly, Paul prayed that God would establish the hearts of the Thessalonian believers in holiness. This is a comprehensive request covering all aspects of one's life. One who is holy is one who seriously deals with sin and exercises spiritual discipline to love a godly life. Again, just as love, this is a work of God in the heart of the true believer. It is only the power of God in our lives that enable us to be holy and to love others.